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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Playing for Keeps: Urban Competition and Game in Middleton's City Comedies

BY

Dale Jacobs ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Edmonton, Alberta
Spring, 1993

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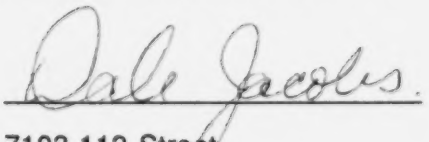

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Playing for Keeps: Urban Competition and Game in Middleton's City Comedies" submitted by Dale Jacobs in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. R. Bowers

Dr. L. Woodbridge

Dr. T. Keating

April 19, 1993

For Heidi,
whose presence and smile has seen me through.

Abstract

In the early Jacobean period tremendous changes in the reality of the urban world began to occur. Urban society, previously stratified exclusively on the basis of class, began to move towards a stratification on the basis of individual competition. Thomas Middleton recognized this emergent trend, and explored it in his city comedies, A Mad World, My Masters, Michaelmas Term, A Trick to Catch the Old One, and A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, written between 1604 and 1613. Within these plays, Middleton mirrors the contemporary aspect of Jacobean London, while undercutting its historical foundation by creating an urban gameworld in which specific rules obtain and in which the situational dynamic outweighs the dynamic of precedent. In this world, players are constrained by the macro-level rules of societal law, convention, and class, while competing with one another at the individual or micro-level. At this level of play, a single constitutive rule exists: any move that is allowed by one's opponent is deemed an acceptable strategy. Thus, players must constantly discover the appropriate moves for specific encounters in order to advance within the various spheres of the urban game. In doing so, players are continually involved in the processes of self-creation and self-definition; in the collection, synthesis, and analysis of information; in predatory and deceptive maneuvers; and in the discourse of situational ethics. In the movement from A Mad World, My Masters to Middleton's final ludic synthesis in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, all of these elements are present, explored, probed, and rigorously examined under the comic microscope of Thomas Middleton.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The prevalent use of game analogy in such widely divergent fields as literature, philosophy, popular psychology, economics, political science, and mathematics points to the importance of game theory in contemporary scholarly discourse. As Robert Wilson suggests in his book, In Palamedes' Shadow, "The interest in play/game theory, cutting across the boundaries of several disciplines, can be viewed as a confluence of distinct lines of analysis and of dissimilar preoccupations" (8). As a result of these "dissimilar preoccupations," there is no consistency in the manner in which theories of game are used in various fields of scholarly endeavour. Indeed, the meaning of the term "game" differs to such an extent in various disciplines that often little resemblance can be detected between the games described in each field. The types of games range from the rigidly formulaic mathematical model to the seemingly boundless and fluid models of popular psychology. Between these two divergent points lie the various applications of game to the study of literature, ranging from considerations of the games that authors play with texts and readers, or that readers play during reading, to considerations of the function of actual games as metaphors within texts. Often, however, there is little regard for the question of definition in these arguments, leaving game as an amorphous mass to be shaped by the critic to suit a specific purpose at a specific time. It is laxity of this type that I wish to avoid in applying theories of game to an analysis of four comedies by Thomas Middleton, all written between 1604 and 1613: Michaelmas Term, A Trick to Catch the Old One, A Mad World, My Masters, and A Chaste Maid in Cheapside. The use of the game analogy in this dissertation will be restricted primarily to an analysis of the interaction between the characters within the fictional worlds of the plays, rather than an analysis of authorial or readerly games, or a historicized or socialized treatment of early

Jacobean London. The fictional gameworld, in which characters assume the roles of players and vie for the spoils of urban competition, underlies the structure of these plays and will therefore form the primary site of my analysis.

First, I would like to formulate a general definition of the term "game" and then describe the type of game that is operating within the fictional worlds of these four plays. In order to do so, it is necessary to turn to the major theorists in the area: Johan Huizinga, Roger Callois, and Bernard Suits. In his book, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture, Huizinga claims that "genuine, pure play is one of the main bases of civilization" and that "we might, in a purely formal sense, call all society a game, if we bear in mind that this game is the living principle of all civilization" (5, 100-01). Within this conception, it is the spirit of playfulness that lifts human beings above the level of survival to the level of civilization. For Huizinga, however, games are but one manifestation of the play-element in culture and are therefore subsumed within the sphere and definition of play. According to Huizinga,

> All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. . . . The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart (10).

It is clear that games, as well as all other activities of human civilization, are extensions of the play-element, governed by special rules and played in specific areas, and that the definition of play is indeed broad enough to subsume all of human society. A specific definition of game is therefore

necessary in order to distinguish games from other manifestations of the play-element.

Based in part on Huizinga's work in the area of play theory, Callois develops his own conception of game in his book, Man, Play, and Games, which includes six elements: freedom, separateness, rules, uncertainty, unproductiveness, and the existence of an alternate reality within the game. The concept of freedom refers to each potential player's choice of participation or non-participation in the game, while separateness refers to the limiting scope of each game in terms of both time and space (7). A game is limited temporally by the fact that it must be able to be resolved to some sort of conclusion and spatially by the boundaries which physically enclose it. Within this temporally and spatially limited world there is also an order set apart from that of the larger outside world. In the words of Callois, "The confused and intricate laws of ordinary life are replaced, in this fixed space and for this given time, by precise, arbitrary, unexceptionable rules that must be accepted as such and that govern the correct playing of the game" (7). In contrast to Huizinga, Callois's conception of ordinary life includes any activity that does not conform to his definition of game, thus expanding the domain of ordinary life, while limiting the province of game. The gameworld differs from reality because it is a separate world with an externally imposed order, or set of rules, which governs the world of the game. In the worlds of Middleton's city comedies, however, ludic and external reality merge within the confines of the urban environment and within the minds of the players who have chosen to venture there.

The basic function of game rules is to prevent certain actions which would allow a player to more easily achieve the goal of the game. A game is played "under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts" (Callois 10). For example, in the

game of darts, a player is not allowed to walk to the dartboard and place his darts in the bullseye, even though this would appear, from the perspective of the outside world, to be the most efficient manner of achieving the goal of hitting the centre of the target. Instead, the rules of the game of darts stipulate that a player must stand at a certain distance from the board when throwing the darts. Likewise, social conventions, specified cultural roles, and individual expectations within Middleton's urban civilizations dictate that certain moves by players are illegal. The player is precluded from certain actions by rules which comprise the external limits or order of the game and it is the acceptance of these rules that makes a game, such as darts or urban competition, possible.

The element of uncertainty implies that the outcome must not be predetermined and must be in doubt during the course of the game, as perceived by gamewright, player(s), or spectator(s), but not necessarily by all three. In the words of Callois, "Doubt must remain until the end, and hinges upon the denouement" (7). According to this criterion, professional wrestling cannot be considered a game because it is staged and the outcome is never in doubt. This is only true, however, from the perspective of the participants and those directly involved in the game. From the point of view of the spectator, uncertainty may exist if he/she believes that the outcome is in doubt and that the course of the game has not been predetermined. It follows that the staging of a play cannot be considered a game, though metaphoric representations of game may be present within the play, even though the audience may not be aware of the ending, because the audience knows that the action and ending of the play have been predetermined. Improvisational theatre, role-playing and children's make-believe, on the other hand, are games of a specific type, which Callois calls mimicry (19). A player in this type of game "forgets, disguises, or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another," not for the purpose

of deception, but for the pleasure derived from becoming another person (Callois 19). The salient point is that uncertainty of outcome is an important component of make-believe and improvisation, while it is absent from the world of scripted theatre. Within the fictional worlds presented in Middleton's comedies, improvisational games of mimicry abound, albeit as a deceptive move within a larger game. The element of uncertainty within Middleton's comic vision of the larger game becomes increasingly apparent until this democratic uncertainty becomes fully manifest in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.

Two elements are included within the assertion that games are unproductive: lack of material creation and lack of remuneration for players. During a discussion of gambling, Callois writes,

> Property is exchanged, but no goods are produced. What is more, this exchange affects only the players, and only to the degree that they accept, through a free decision remade at each game, the probability of such a transfer. A characteristic of play, in fact, is that it creates no wealth or goods, thus differing from work or art. At the end of the game, all can and must start over again at the same point (5).

Although it is true that games usually involve no material production[1] , property may be exchanged and, therefore, wealth may be obtained by one or more players. For example, both in the game of poker and in the Middletonian urban game, money is exchanged as a result of play; material gain is a very integral

---

[1] Although material production is not often associated with games, it is possible to make the production of goods into a game through the introduction of a rule or rules that would make production more difficult. For example, the baking of bread could be turned into a game through the introduction of a rule stating that only the left hand may be used while baking or the imposition of a time limit.

part of both games. In these games, winning or losing is determined by the increase or decrease in a player's original stake. It may be argued that an increase in the player's status is only a result of randomly winning various hands or chance circumstances throughout the course of play, but this argument denies an essential strategy employed in these games: the bluff. This strategy depends completely upon players choosing to risk or not risk some sort of material wealth (whether it is money or matchsticks). Without bluffing, winning becomes contingent upon chance, rather than skill, and while a game is still present, it is a completely different entity. In poker and urban competition, material gain is not only a possibility, but, within the definition of these particular games, is a necessity. It is, of course, permissible that the pool of resources may be redistributed equally among players at the conclusion of a game of poker (as often happens if matchsticks or mints are the stakes), but it is not, as Callois argues, a necessary condition of the game. Perhaps if Callois had ever tried to re-appropriate his money at the end of a game of high stakes poker or at the end of Middletonian urban competition, he would have realized the absurdity of this statement. As well, remuneration of players may either be an integral part of the fabric of the game itself or be an extrinsic benefit, as in the case of the ventures of Middleton's capitalistic urban players.

In Callois's view, the professional athlete or the Middletonian urban player "does not play, but merely practices a profession" (45). According to this logic, the professional baseball player does not play the game of baseball, but instead works for his living under the guise of playing. Suits, however, refutes this argument by differentiating between the professional and the amateur:

> By amateurs I mean those for whom playing the game is an end in itself, and by professionals I mean those who have in view some further purpose which is achievable by playing the game. . . . although

> professionals and amateurs admittedly have different attitudes towards the games they play, they have the same attitude towards the rules of those games (143-44).

The baseball player and the urban player are not merely working, but are playing their respective games (by obeying its rules) with the further purpose in mind of being paid for their efforts. Professionals "are using a game to be sure, but they are using a game by playing it" (Suits 146). Within this framework, a person who plays poker in a game involving the exchange of money may or may not be a professional. If the player engages in the game of poker for relaxation and/or recreation, he or she is an amateur, but if material gain is the main motive behind entry into the game, he or she is a professional. Characters such as Lucre, Hoard, or the Courtesan in A Trick to Catch the Old One, therefore, must be considered professionals since each earns his or her livelihood through the construct of the urban game. Between professionals and amateurs, the attitude toward the game is different, while the attitude toward the rules remains the same. Remuneration of players, then, does not interfere with the status of the game itself as long as the players accept the rules of the particular game.

The final element in Callois's conception of game is the concept of an alternate reality, located within the game and separate from real life. This alternate reality is governed by boundaries in time and space and by limitations imposed upon it by its own set of rules, and is thus related directly to the concepts of separateness and rules. The game becomes a self-contained world, completely apart from the outside world, with rules consistent unto itself, like a fictional world created by an author:

> The assumptions of a fictional, or 'possible,' world may be said to correspond to those of a game in that they restrict what may happen,

> delimit action, and make certain other things (character, incident, description, events, and existents) possible with a high disregard for what may be the case outside the text (Wilson 14).

A game is designed by a gamewright, but is played by others, much as a play is read and performed by persons other than the author. In other words, "a structure in the mind of one person can be absorbed, digested, and become the temporary structure of another's mind" (Wilson 5). As seen in Middleton's city comedies, it is possible for players to surrender themselves to the concerns of the game to such a degree that regard for all outside matters is temporarily suspended. Within these plays, the ludic reality of the urban world becomes the perceived reality for the players. For such interest to be maintained, almost infinite variance must be built into the structure of games. Wilson claims,

> The permutations of play within a particular game never exhaust the possibilities of the rules. Like texts, games invisibly recall other games, replicate them (often unconsciously), and build upon them in such matters as improving skill, developing better strategies, and creating more sophisticated play (5).

The alternate reality of the game captures the imaginations of the players to the temporary, and often permanent, exclusion of the outside world. Inhabitants of the urban world become embroiled in its game and in their positions within that game.

Having discussed the strengths and limitations of the Calloisian model, I can now proceed to the definition of game proposed by Bernard Suits in The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia. Suits writes,

> To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs (prelusory goal), using only means permitted by the rules (lusory means), where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less

> efficient means (constitutive rules), and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such an activity (lusory attitude) (41).

The specific state of affairs, or prelusory goal, that players of a game attempt to achieve varies between different types of games. For example, in the game of hockey, the prelusory goal is to put the puck in the opposing team's net more times than they put the puck in your net within a given time period, while the prelusory goal in the urban gameworld is to increase (or at least preserve) one's monetary, social, and/or sexual position/possessions. These types of activities may be called closed games because they involve goals which will end the individual game (Suits 133). Even as one individual encounter ends, however, others are simultaneously enacted within the constantly fluctuating urban milieu. The prelusory goal in make-believe games, on the other hand, is the continuation of the game of impersonation and this type of game "is successful just to the extent that it continues to produce responses" (Suits 125). Make-believe, role-playing, and improvisation may be termed open games, since they have "no inherent goal whose achievement ends the game" (Suits 133). Although it is true that these games have no inherent goal in themselves, they may be used as effective strategies within the larger urban game. In addition, the attainment of prelusory goals is restricted by a rule or a set of rules which define or constitute the game and which restrict the means through which the players may attain their prelusory goal. For example, in the game of hockey, the rules stipulate that players may not throw the puck into the opposing team's net, while in the urban gameworld players are restricted to the moves that are deemed acceptable by the players in each individual encounter. While throwing the puck into the opponents' goal or using a weapon to take an opponent's money would make it much easier for a person to attain the prelusory goal, moves such as these would place the person outside the game

spheres of hockey and urban competition. Players are allowed, however, to choose any lusory means that are not prohibited by the constitutive rules of the particular game. Skill at a game entails using the most efficient means available within the rules of the game.

Constitutive rules define and make possible any activity that may be called a game and, in general, players accept these rules just because this makes possible the activity. However, the initial freedom to enter or decline entry into the world of the game is not always available to a player, making the acceptance of the game rules mandatory for that player. This mandatory acceptance does not preclude him or her from displaying a lusory attitude within the game itself. Rules may be accepted at face value simply by virtue of the fact that they are rules; a person may obey a rule simply because that rule exists. It is possible for a person to display a blind acceptance of the rules, and thus a lusory attitude, within the limited world of the game even if he or she has absolutely no desire to participate. A person may not, on the other hand, choose to recognize the rules and/or the goal of a game. Suits writes,

> In summary, it may be said that triflers recognize rules but not goals, cheats recognize goals but not rules, players recognize both rules and goals, and spoilsports recognize neither rules nor goals; and that while players acknowledge the claims of both the game and its institution, triflers and cheats acknowledge only institutional claims, and spoilsports acknowledge neither (47).

Let us return to the urban gameworld to provide examples. A trifler, such as Sir Bounteous Progress in A Mad World, My Masters, obeys the rules of the urban game, but has a purpose in mind other than increasing his stature in one of the gamespheres; he seeks entertainment rather than urban winnings. A cheat disregards the rules in order to fulfill the prelusory goal and win the game.

However, since any move is allowable within the urban game that is acceptable to the other player(s) in a specific encounter, the cheat, whose moves are judged illegal, is also the player who ultimately loses in the urban game. Both the cheat and the trifler acknowledge the institution of the game, but do not acknowledge the claims of the particular encounter at which they are trifling or cheating. A player like Witgood in A Trick to Catch the Old One, on the other hand, plays by the rules, while a spoilsport, such as the Country Wench's father in Michaelmas Term, refuses to participate by acknowledging neither the prelusory goal, nor its rules. Clearly it is necessary that both the rules and the goals of a game must be acknowledged in order for the game to exist and be played. In the world of Middleton's city comedies, the urban game exists because almost every player acknowledges both the rules and the goals of the game.

Suits's formulation fuses the concepts of separateness and rules, which combine to form an alternate reality of the gameworld, while dispensing, as I have shown, with the concepts of freedom and unproductiveness. Uncertainty is the only element of the Calloisian model which Suits does not explicitly address in this definition, although it is implicit later in his argument. During a discussion of the difference between make-believe games and stage acting, Suits writes that "Acting out a part in a play is simply being enslaved to some script writer. It is like miming the moves in a game which has already been played by someone else" (110). Clearly, uncertainty of outcome is an elements in Suits's conception of game, although it is not explicitly part of the above definition. While the definition proposed by Suits is based on the work of Huizinga and Callois, it is a more completely refined and practical model.

Synthesizing the concepts of Huizinga, Callois, and Suits, I define game as the pursuit of a specific goal within a prescribed set of rules accepted within

the context or world of the game and existing in order to limit the options available to players. Moreover, the outcome of the game is in doubt from the perspective of the gamewright, player(s), or spectator(s). Given this working definition, it is now possible to examine the type of game that occurs in Michaelmas Term, A Trick to Catch the Old One, A Mad World, My Masters, and A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.

In the artificially constructed world of Middleton's city comedies, he has created a situational dynamic that is contemporary in aspect, while it is removed from historical grounding by its ludic framework which refuses to credit precedent. The emergent trend towards a competitive paradigm is thus transformed into a theatrical investigation of the latent possibilities of such emergence. For the inhabitants of this world, reality is a subjective construct based on the perception of each individual character. If perception is reality, then appearance, surface, and style, rather than substance, become the focal point of this perceptual reality. Within this milieu, the dominant culture creates a set of prescribed roles for the members of the society and a set of overriding cultural norms or rules, so that a thin veneer of order can be laid over the anarchic actuality of the city. A set of rules at the societal, or macro-level, determines the general options and roles of the inhabitants of the city, while at the level of perceptual reality, or micro-level, another set of rules governs the confrontations between individual players. Portrayed in these plays is a Middletonian conception of a world in a state of transition, moving from a society stratified by class towards a society stratified on the basis of competition. Societal norms are challenged, pushed, and altered by the characters of the plays, so that the important aspects of their urban world are appearance, perception, and the resulting relational character of reality. Reality is relational since perception, and hence reality, depends upon the specific relational

situation in which a character finds him or herself. Through these plays, Middleton explores the concept of perceptual or relational reality and the resulting schema within which his characters associate with one another.

The attempt to disguise the anarchy of the city through the imposition of societal norms or rules is an attempt to deny the predatory nature of this environment, in which people prey upon one another in a type of urban Darwinism. The urban world is a man-made construct and no common value system exists within this artificial ecosystem. Each person strives toward self-preservation and self-assertion within his or her own value system, virtually without regard for others within the sphere. However, commonalities do exist within this world, based not upon a shared value system, but upon expectation, appearance, and perception, the elements which comprise the micro-level game. This game of human competition is deadly and the stakes are high.

The action and structure of Middleton's comedies of the early Jacobean period may thus be viewed as analogous to the action and structure of a game. The world of the game is the urban milieu, which, like an arena, is both separate and enclosed, and the players of the game are the inhabitants of the city, each of whom is trying to survive within the framework of his or her own value system. The laws and norms of the dominant culture form a macro-level set of rules, setting the outer limits of allowable moves by players in the game. Within individual relations, however, the important set of rules exists at the micro-level of human perception and expectation. In effect, the only constitutive rule of the game is that any move is allowable, within a particular relational matrix, that is deemed acceptable by one's opponent and which does not constitute a transgression of the macro-level rules to the extent that a penalty is incurred. In other words, a player can execute any move that is acceptable to the other player or players and may even flaunt the norms and laws of society if he is not

caught. Rules of skill are also important in the urban gameworld, as certain acceptable moves will allow a player to advance more quickly in the game than will others, depending upon the expectations and perceptions of the player with whom he or she is engaged. Every move in the game, then, will be allowable and successful, allowable and unsuccessful, or disallowed by the other player, in which case the particular game terminates or is reformulated. Each player must discover both the moves allowed within the constitutive rules and the rules of skill necessary for each particular encounter. Both sets of rules are relational because they are based on the relations between players and the perceptions and expectations that form reality for the other players. In interacting with an opponent, each player must first determine the general parameters of acceptable moves for that situation, and then utilize the rules of skill to determine which specific moves will bring about the desired resolution. Rules are not static, but are in constant relational flux and must be constantly rediscovered by the participants. The characters who are able to discover the rules and quickly adapt to rule changes will survive in the predatory arena of the urban setting.

The main difference, then, between a conventional parlor game and the "real-life" game of this fictional world is the fact that the rules are hidden, waiting to be discovered by players who are not always easily identifiable. In Games as Models of Social Phenomena, Henry Hamburger writes,

> For example, in a parlor game it is easy to see who the players are, while in a real situation it is more difficult . . . . Another way in which parlor games are more precisely defined than real-life situations is that in chess, for example, the rules tell you exactly what you are allowed to do, while the rules of life are not always clearly spelled out (3).

The game situation that exists in these plays is akin to the economic and mathematical model, in which "the key idea of a game is that the players make decisions that affect each other" (Hamburger 1-2). Each player operates within a framework of interdependence, attempting to pursue his or her own interest, while "also figuring how the other [player] will be pursuing his" (Schellenberg 8). Players accept the rules of the urban gameworld, though not necessarily by choice, in the pursuit of survival and success within each person's particular value system. In short, the fictional gameworld created by Thomas Middleton in Michaelmas Term, A Trick to Catch the Old One, A Mad World, My Masters, and A Chaste Maid in Cheapside is capitalistic, unsentimental, subjective, and often anti-feminist. Through a critical reading of each of these plays, I will explore Middleton's various incarnations of the urban gameworld, culminating in his final comic synthesis of the urban game in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.

Chapter 2 - A Mad World, My Masters

Written between 1604 and 1606, A Mad World, My Masters reveals a fictional world with few shared social norms, in which the actions of characters are based primarily upon their perceptions of others' expectations. By playing upon the perceived expectations of other inhabitants of this urban gameworld, characters, or players, seek to gull one another in a competition for money, power, prestige, and sexual favors. Unfortunately, as Anthony Covatta points out in Thomas Middleton's City Comedies, "Most cannot understand others' actions or judge the implications of their own, and they continually play into the hands of those who would gull them" (131). No one is invulnerable and even those who are adept at the game are liable to become duped themselves at some point in the course of the play. As the play's title, taken from a contemporary slang truism, suggests, the distinction is blurred between masters and mastered; characters act as both the masters and the mastered in the play's mad world, the play sphere within which the players compete. Characters must negotiate this arena, since the disorder and "madness of Middleton's world is not to be rejected; it must be lived with because it is part of the very fabric of social life" (Covatta 131). This mad world is a barely cohesive, artificial human community in which each person attempts to look out for his or her own interests within his or her own system of ethics and, not surprisingly, where few values are shared among the inhabitants. The values that are shared are those socially constructed norms which form the macro-level rules of the game and mark the outer limits for players in the determination of roles and choices. In other words, these societal constructs constitute another possible aspect of the "masters" of the title since all characters are subject, at least at the level of appearance, to the expected norms of society and will suffer the censure of that society for ignoring those limits. In order to move successfully within the mad

gameworld of A Mad World, My Masters, players must become proficient at distinguishing reality from illusion at both the macro- and micro-levels. As George E. Rowe, Jr. writes, "the 'mad world' which the characters must control is . . . the realm of fantasy and imagination. The ability to avoid falling prey to illusion, whether self-created or otherwise, is the measure of this mastery" (109-10). Like the many-layered title of the play, the characters must function at several levels to remain ascendant on the side of mastery.

The action of A Mad World, My Masters involves three distinct, yet intertwined plots in which the characters engage one another for the attainment of various goals. The main plot traces the machinations of Richard Follywit as he attempts to extract money from his grandfather through increasingly elaborate swindles. Interwoven with this plot is the conflict between Master Harebrain and Penitent Brothel for the possession of Mistress Harebrain's sexual favors and the various attempts to snare the courtesan, Frank Gullman, while Gullman simultaneously attempts to increase her wealth and trap a rich and prestigious husband. As William Slights points out, "The dramatic pattern of each of the three plots is a familiar one in Renaissance comedy: the clever manipulator disguises himself, the gull boasts some kind of prowess, he is gulled, and finally he reflects on his ill fortune" (92). Skilled and experienced players are able to detect areas of flawed perception and expectation in their opponents and play upon those weaknesses in order to advance in the sphere of the game. Players must reevaluate each particular situation to determine the necessary strategy and adapt to that situation based upon knowledge and perceptions of their opponents' expectations and perceptions. As the courtesan's mother aptly points out, the number of skilled players forms a substantial portion of the total:

> Every part of the world shoots up daily into more subtlety.

> The very spider weaves her cauls with more art and cunning
> to entrap the fly.
> The shallow plowman can distinguish now
> 'Twixt simple truth and a dissembling brow,
> Your base mechanic fellow can spy out
> A weakness in a lord, and learns to flout.
> How does't behoove us then that live by sleight
> To have our wits wound up to their stretch'd height! (I.i.140-48).

Every player is subject to the possibility of defeat because of the existence of other skilled players in the game and because of the fact that a player's perception of a specific situation is always uncertain. This possibility means that Follywit, as his oxymoronic name suggests, "can, in different situations, be first wit and then gull," both master and mastered in the course of the play (Slights 92). No player is invincible and there are no certain outcomes in this world.

The player who best exemplifies the vagaries of the play's gameworld is Richard Follywit, who sees himself from the outset as an expert craftsman of ruses and manipulator of situations. In response to greetings by Mawworm and Hoboy, Follywit replies,

> Call me your forecast, you whoresons. When you come drunk out of a tavern, 'tis I must cast your plots into form still; 'tis I must manage the prank, or I'll not give a louse for the proceedings; I must let fly my civil fortunes, turn wild-brain, lay my wits upo' th' tenters, you rascals, to maintain a company of villains whom I love in my very soul and conscience (I.i.4-10).

Follywit is the mastermind of the gang, arranging, plotting, and "casting" their moves in the urban gameworld. He relies only upon himself and does not give credence to any plot that he has not devised and managed from beginning to end. In Follywit's mind, the gang is an extension of himself, "true and necessary implements of mischief" for his use in the game, and the fortunes of the gang are his own fortunes; Follywit risks his own civil fortunes, devises the scams, and stretches his wits at each successive turn (I.i.57). In the words of Regents editor Standish Henning, "Follywit's success is to be measured by the brilliance of his inventive tricks, of which he himself is very proud, rather than by the more sober standards of right and wrong" (xi). Within the sphere of the game, success depends on the ability to bring about one's desired outcome and it is this ability that Follywit manifests in the schemes which he unleashes upon his unsuspecting grandfather, Sir Bounteous Progress. He revels not only in the utility of the plots, but even more in their style, inventiveness, and ironic brashness. Follywit is a virtuoso player because he is as concerned with the style and manner in which he wins a specific encounter as he is with the actual substance, or goal and prize, of that encounter. It is this love of style and appearance that leads Penitent Brothel to muse about Follywit,

> Here's a mad-brain o' th' first, whose pranks scorn to have precedents, to be second to any, or walk beneath any mad-cap's inventions; h'as play'd more tricks than the cards can allow a man, and of the last stamp, too; hating imitation, a fellow whose only glory is to be prime of the company, to be sure of which he maintains all the rest (I.i.83-88).

Penitent asserts that Follywit's objective in the game is the quest for ever new subterfuges and a desire for the adoration of his fellow rogues and that he gains this adoration by supporting them and allowing them to benefit from his

schemes. In Penitent's opinion, one of Follywit's tricks will soon fail, since only a finite number of manipulations or ruses are possible within a closed system, such as the London arena. In the language of the card table, Follywit has already won more tricks than it is possible to win in the urban gameworld. Through this allusion to cards, Penitent links the fictional world which he inhabits to the competitive sphere of games, while placing Follywit in the position of a champion who is at the top of his game, but is due for a fall or loss.

An easier and more congenial dupe could not be found for Follywit's schemes than Sir Bounteous Progress who is overly hospitable and generous to a fault, except with regard to his errant grandson. As Follywit explains, it is ostensibly because of this exception that he chooses to play his mischief upon his grandfather:

> . . . You all know the
> possibilities of my hereafter fortunes, and the humor of my
> frolic grandsire, Sir Bounteous Progress, whose death makes
> all possible to me: I shall have all when he has nothing; but now he
> has all, I shall have nothing. . . .
> I know my grandsire has his will
> in a box, and has bequeath'd all to me when he can carry
> nothing away; but stood I in need of poor ten pounds now,
> by his will I should hang myself ere I should get it (I.i.38-42, I.i.47-50).

It is the will of Sir Bounteous, in the sense of both legal documentation and living choice, that, while Bounteous lives, Follywit is to receive no money from his grandfather's estate. Follywit, of course, disagrees, arguing that he should have immediate access to a portion of the estate instead of being forced to wait until his grandfather's death. Taken to mean desire or wishes, Sir Bounteous's humor refers to the exclusion of Follywit from the circle of hospitality, but this

humor may also refer to the ostentatious display of wealth and hospitality that will make Sir Bounteous an easy mark for Follywit and his gang. In addition, Follywit's assertion that when he has all, Sir Bounteous shall have nothing is also a comment on the nature of the competitive arena in which they live. If, in the generational contest between the two men, Follywit's schemes are successful, money and property will be transferred to him from Bounteous, potentially leaving Follywit with all and Bounteous with nothing. As his aptronym suggests, Sir Bounteous provides a seemingly endless supply of money and good cheer, allowing his grandson an outlet for his schemes, while never allowing those tricks to affect his disposition. Theodore Leinwand writes, "As an urban good housekeeper without rival, Sir Bounteous opens up a space in which Follywit may play out his repertory of tricks;" Leinwand continues, "The young man must operate within Sir Bounteous's magical, comic space, . . . it makes little difference what tricks he plays there" (104, 105). Though Follywit is able to dupe the ambivalent Sir Bounteous with relative ease, the victories ring hollow because of the extreme facility with which the old knight shrugs off these gullings. Not only does Sir Bounteous not realize that he is engaged in a competition with Follywit, but such a realization would not even matter to him. According to Covatta, Sir Bounteous is "Not competitor, so much as the play's center, he is the still point around which other characters revolve, striving to reach their goals' (125). Thus, in the monetary sphere of the urban gameworld, Sir Bounteous stands inert at the centre of a vortex, remaining relatively unaffected by the outcomes of the game while all of the other players swirl in competitive eddies around him. There is, however, another aspect of the gameworld that concerns Sir Bounteous in which prestige, rather than money, marks both the goal and the prize. Sir Bounteous's desire for prestige both defines his character and makes him an easy, yet unsatisfying mark for Follywit.

As has been noted, in gulling Sir Bounteous, Follywit is not only concerned with the utility of his plots, but is also extremely interested in their style and appearance. Follywit's interest in the spectacle of his ruses is aptly reflected in the theatrical flair with which he chooses to undertake these tricks and in the number of changes in appearance that he and his henchman undergo in their performance. Since identity is a matter of appearance, "real success in the city requires substantial control over one's costume and actions" (Leinwand 101). Through disguise, Follywit is able to adapt his appearance, and hence his identity, to each specific situation, choosing from the range of societal choices the role that he deems necessary in relation to his perceptions of his opponent's expectations. As Henning points out, "he plays so many roles we scarcely discover who he really is" as he flits from one performance to the next in his efforts to gull his grandfather (xi). Henning goes on to argue that "there is a quality of childish wish-fulfillment in Follywit's rapid, nearly Protean changes of disguise which tend to make him proof against the retaliations of society;" and furthermore: "Next to being invisible, an impenetrable disguise is the best way to free oneself from the prying eye of an adult moral world" (xi). In direct contrast to this view, Leanore Lieblein argues, "While using several disguises and scenarios in order to gull his grandfather of money, Follywit enacts a succession of roles which enable him to develop and explore his own identity" (56). Taking still another view, Covatta asserts, "In his tricks and disguises, Follywit abandons his own social position in order to engineer his grandfather into a proper role" (127). Each of these positions rightly implies that there is a deeper motive to Follywit's machinations than a simple lust for money, but all, I think, wrongly attribute that motivation. These critics fail to note that Follywit is an expert player within the urban gameworld, adept at discerning and using the proper disguises necessary for advancement within the game, and

that he quite simply enjoys displaying his talent. Quite simply, he thrives on the creative element of gamesmanship. Like a professional basketball player who enjoys slamming the ball through the hoop, though a simple lay-up will suffice, Follywit tries, through the use of disguise, to make a caper as stylish and theatrical as possible in the course of attaining the goal. The thrill of playing does not, as Covatta asserts, make Follywit "in the truest sense of the word, an amateur of his game," but rather a professional who happens to enjoy the game that he plays. In vanquishing an opponent, the style with which the victory is achieved is nearly as important as the actual result. This is especially true when confronting an easy mark, such as Sir Bounteous, tempting the expert player to make the game harder for himself by introducing increasingly complex scenarios to the game.

Follywit's first move in the contest to gull Sir Bounteous of his money is the impersonation of the fictitious Lord Owemuch. A footman is dispatched to announce the imminent arrival of this eminent lord to Sir Bounteous, who, ever ready to display his house to a lord, takes the bait and is reeled into the trap. Bounteous is extremely concerned with his reputation for both riches and hospitality and goes out of his way to show these qualities through conspicuous consumption and over-zealous generosity. The display of these qualities causes the First Knight to remind Sir Bounteous, "You have been too much like your name," which perfectly expresses both the old knight's character and temperament (II.i.1). Sir Bounteous realizes the extent to which he is embodied in his name, saying, "Is not my name Sir Bounteous? Am I not, expressed there?" (IV.iii.91). He is proud of his name and the character and riches that it implies and wishes to solidify a reputation to that effect throughout the kingdom. News that a lord is about who has not experienced his hospitality naturally arouses the interest and the curiosity of Sir Bounteous, as he wishes to show

this lord his house and his generosity, while simultaneously ascertaining whether or not his reputation has reached Lord Owemuch. In order to determine his level of reputation, and thus his position in the game with which he is concerned, Sir Bounteous asks the footman a number of questions about the extent of Owemuch's knowledge of the house. Since Follywit is concerned with style and effect, the footman's answers are suitably vague and offer no cause for celebration to Sir Bounteous, but it is eventually communicated that it is Sir Bounteous whom Owemuch has come to see. Upon learning this information, Bounteous says,

> I knew I should have him i'th' end; there's not a lord will miss me, I thank their good honors; 'tis a fortune laid upon me, they can scent out their best entertainment; I have a kind of complimental gift given me above ordinary country knights, and how soon 'tis smelt out! I warrant ye there's not one knight i'th' shire able to entertain a lord i'th' cue, or a lady i'th' nick like me, like me. There's a kind of grace belongs to't, a kind of art which naturally slips from me, I know not on't, I promise you, 'tis gone before I'm aware on't (II.i.49-58).

In a sense, Sir Bounteous collects the presence of lords, adding each, like a game trophy, to the roster of hospitality which he may display to the world. He has an abundance of money and uses this money as a tool to gain recognition in the contest for reputation. Money and a reputation for generosity act as Bounteous's bait in the pursuit of prestige, as lords "scent out their best entertainment" or smell his "complimental gift" (II.i.50-51). Like Follywit, Sir Bounteous is more concerned with appearance than with substance, thereby denigrating the act of hospitality to a level below the conspicuous display of that hospitality. Follywit realizes this trait in his grandfather's character and is able to discern the appropriate moves to make and the proper role to assume.

Having sufficiently piqued the interest of the old knight, Follywit enters the scene in the guise of Lord Owemuch and honors Sir Bounteous with flattery, the appropriate opening move for this particular opponent. Follywit says, "Only your bounteous disposition / Fame hath divulg'd, and is to me well known," to which Sir Bounteous replies, "Nay, and your lordship know my disposition, you know me better than they that know my person; your honor is so much the welcomer for that" (II.i.96-101). Through such statements, Follywit immediately ingratiates himself with his host and lays the groundwork for the moves that follow. That night Follywit and his band, dressed in masking suits and vizards, bind Sir Bounteous and rob the house. Sir Bounteous, however, is more concerned with his reputation for hospitality and, ironically, with the good opinion of Lord Owemuch, whose sleep he fears will be disturbed: "Oh, not so loud, sir, you're too shrill a gentleman. I have a lord lies in my house; I would not for the world his honor should be disquieted" (II.iv.29-31). Bounteous is more apprehensive about a possible loss of reputation than he is with the possibility of any monetary loss.

The relative lack of concern for monetary considerations on the part of Sir Bounteous places him in the unique position of non-player within the arena of monetary competition. Although he cannot extract money from his grandfather without subterfuge, Follywit realizes from the outset that money is not a central concern in the life of Sir Bounteous, thus making the game less challenging for the superior player. To compensate for this lack of challenge, Follywit imposes additional conditions on the successful completion of the game that not only enhance the difficulty, but also transform his performance into a tour de force of stylish gamesmanship. As Follywit says to his gang,

> . . . We now arrive at the most ticklish
> point, to rob and take our ease, to be thieves and lie by't.

> Look to't, lads, it concerns every man's gullet; I'll not have
> the jest spoiled, that's certain, though it hazard a windpipe.
> I'll either go like a lord as I came, or be hang'd like a thief
> as I am; and that's my resolution (II.iv.86-91).

Difficulty and style are successfully combined as Follywit escapes in the guise of a lord, but not before gulling Bounteous of an additional two hundred pounds. From first to last, each of Follywit's moves is calculated to achieve the desired effect on the old knight, producing a stylish victory for the young player.

The second encounter between Follywit and his grandfather is ostensibly precipitated by Follywit's discovery that Sir Bounteous keeps a courtesan, Frank Gullman. Upon learning this fact, Follywit exclaims,

> So much the more preposterous for me; I shall hop shorter
> by that trick: she carries away the thirds at least. 'Twill prove
> entail'd land, I am afraid, when all's done, i'faith. Nay, I
> have known a vicious, old, thought-acting father,
> Damn'd only in his dreams, thirsting for game
> (When his best parts hung down their heads for shame)
> For his blanch'd harlot dispossess his son
> And make the pox his heir; 'twas gravely done (III.iii.33-40).

Follywit contends that the courtesan represents a threat to his inheritance since he believes that if she is not discredited, his grandfather will leave a portion of money to her. The courtesan's sexuality and her illicit union with Sir Bounteous are the causes of Follywit's distress, as seen in the sexually charged language ("trick" and "entail'd land") which he uses to describe the situation. Within this generational conflict, Follywit also raises the issue of sexual potency, implying that Sir Bounteous is impotent and too old to pursue the game of love, and is instead capable of performing the sexual act only in his imagination. Cognizant

also of this issue, Bounteous earlier assumes that he has caused Frank Gullman's 'illness' by making her pregnant: "Ha, ha, I have fitted her; an old knight and a cock o'th' game still; I have not spurs for nothing, I see" (III.ii.76-79). In contrast to Follywit's assertion, Bounteous avers that he is fully able to pursue the game of love. Regardless of this discussion of the relative potency of the elder generation, Follywit's intention is to discredit the courtesan in the eyes of his grandfather, while simultaneously turning a profit at the expense of the old knight: "I have begot that means which will both furnish me, / And make that quean walk under his conceit" (III.iii.69-70). In combining these elements, Follywit is again able to devise a plan that is difficult and stylish, yet very effective in its application. This scheme necessitates the ultimate use of appearance manipulation, and hence gamesmanship, on the part of Follywit: the transvestite assumption of the identity of Frank Gullman. Just as Follywit had earlier accused Gullman of sexual manipulation of Sir Bounteous, Follywit now comically engages in similar manipulation himself through the use of a transvestite persona. In the guise of the courtesan, Follywit keeps his appointment with Sir Bounteous, robs the old knight, and then disappears, discrediting Frank Gullman and making away with the spoils of his victory. Ironically, however, the woman whom he discredits will prove to be both his wife and his undoing, thus demonstrating metaphorically that each player is at once both master and mastered and that even the best player cannot be assured of perpetual victory.

At the first glimpse of Frank Gullman, Follywit falls in love, temporarily losing the ability to discern illusion from reality, which undermines his complete control of the game. Not realizing the actual identity of this woman, Follywit knows only that he wants her desperately:

> Shall I be madder now than ever I have been? I'm in the way, i' faith.

Man's never at high height of madness full
Until he love and prove a woman's gull.
I do protest in earnest I ne'er knew
At which end to begin to affect a woman
Till this bewitching minute; I ne'er saw
Face worth my object till mine eye met hers.
I should laugh and I were caught, i' faith (IV.v.11-19)

Follywit realizes that, for him, falling in love does entail the height of madness and that this act will cause his awareness within the game to be dulled while he is preoccupied with thoughts of a woman. In a standard trope, he speaks of love as a woman's trap into which men fall, but, ironically, in this case it is literally true that Follywit becomes a woman's gull because he fails to discern the illusion of Frank Gullman's appearance from the reality of her character. As Leinwand writes, Follywit "treats the world as his stage but forgets fully to account for the other actors" (106). Within the milieu of the urban gameworld, Follywit begins to overlook the presence and expertise of other players or, in Covatta's words, "the master fooler fails only when he indulges in the faults and stupidities of his dupes" (132). In conversation with the courtesan's mother, Follywit says, "Give me a woman as she was made at first, simple of herself, without sophistication, like this wench; I cannot abide them when they have tricks, set speeches and artful entertainments" (IV.v.56-59). This admission of naivete amounts to an admission of defeat in the encounter between Follywit and Frank Gullman, allowing the courtesan and her mother to reel in the "bird well caught" (IV.v.134). The victory, however, is not complete, as the pair also fails to discern the reality behind Follywit's appearance. As the play reaches its crescendo, it is apparent that there are no players who are invincible in the

urban arena and that all players are subject to eventual defeat. The distinction between the masters and the mastered becomes ever more blurred.

The final encounter between Follywit and his grandfather occurs once more at the residence of Sir Bounteous, during a feast at which all of the play's major characters are in attendance. Follywit comes to the feast in the guise of an actor leading a performing troop in the service of Lord Owemuch, a fitting final role for Follywit since he has used disguise and deception throughout the course of his maneuvres. This self-reflexive detail emphasizes the theatricality of Middleton's gameworld, while simultaneously reminding the audience that this gameworld is subsumed within the play sphere of the theatre. The play that Follywit proposes for presentation is aptly titled The Slip, a name which refers to both a counterfeit coin and the act of disappearing with the spoils of the ruse. Left alone after securing Sir Bounteous's consent to the play and several valuable properties for its staging, Follywit explains his plot to the audience:

> . . . I'll set my fellows going first; they
> must have time and leisure, or they're dull else. I'll stay and
> speak a prologue, yet o'ertake 'em; I cannot have conscience,
> i' faith, to go away and speak ne'er a word to'em. My
> grandsire has given me three shares here; sure I'll do
> somewhat for 'em (V.i.137-42).

Even with a sure victory secured, Follywit cannot resist the inclusion of an additional twist to increase the difficulty of the game and the stylishness of the trick. Before slipping away to meet his fellows, he recites a prologue to the counterfeit play in which he ironically speaks of "*wand'ring knights, what them betide / Who nor in one place, nor one shape abide*," masters of disguise and trickery of the same ilk as Follywit and his crew (V.ii.16-17). Unfortunately for Follywit, a constable captures the others and returns them to the scene of the

crime, forcing the master player to adapt quickly to the new situation. With the arrival of the constable, Follywit is left with only one viable alternative: the inclusion of the officer in an improvised play. In his play role as judge, Follywit assumes the rei(g)ns of authority from the constable and deflects the attention of the audience from the reality of the situation to the illusion of the improvised play. As Lieblein writes, "Follywit's pretence of justice is accepted over the protestations of the true representative of law who is taken by the audience for the constable in the comedy rather than the constable in the commonwealth" (58). Follywit manipulates the reality within the improvised play in much the same manner that he has manipulated the reality of another play, Middleton's A Mad World, My Masters. Once again, Follywit assumes the appropriate role and executes the correct moves, enabling the actors to once again escape from the house of Sir Bounteous, victorious within the urban milieu which is constituted by the play.

On this occasion, however, the trick is not to be completely successful. In his own shape, Follywit returns to the scene of the crime and the company of the gulled audience, but in doing so he has the misfortune to be discovered through the ringing of his grandfather's stolen watch. As Sir Bounteous begins to question his grandson about his stolen timepiece and jewelry, Follywit quickly changes the subject, diverting Bounteous's attention from the theft to the younger's impending marriage, a topic that Follywit perceives will alleviate the tension of the situation. Follywit's move consists of adopting the role of the prodigal son, a part that he is sure will please his grandfather and allow victory to be snatched from the jaws of defeat. Upon learning the identity of Follywit's intended wife, Sir Bounteous exclaims, "Speak, son, is't true? / Can you gull us, and let a quean gull you?" (V.ii.256-57). To Follywit, the master player, "tricks are repaid," and, true to the comedic tradition, all parties are reconciled

(V.ii.261). In this case, reconciliation is possible only because the urban landscape of A Mad World, My Masters lacks a coherent, societally constructed centre of moral and ethical authority. The attitudes and values of the characters are fluid, allowing easy acceptance of various ethical positions in defiance of the rigidity of a strict moral code. As Covatta writes,

> Follywit's and Sir Bounteous's ethical attitudes are ultimately situational, as is the play's. Laws and rules present valid guidelines for conduct only when men find it possible to live under them. When they do not, they may and should go outside the limits of customary conduct (130).

Rigidity is replaced by fluidity, allowing Follywit to redeem himself in the eyes of the assembled party.

Sir Bounteous is able to accept, and even reward, the conduct of his grandson because he shares the same fluid value system with a majority of the characters in the play. All of these characters are players within the urban gameworld, using all available means to advance in the game towards each individual goal. It is impossible and hypocritical for any player to claim moral high ground in this world, and it is also advisable that no player should, since it is likely that all players will eventually fall in defeat. In the final words of the play, spoken by Sir Bounteous, "Who lives by cunning, mark it, his fate's cast; / When he has gull'd all, then is himself the last" (V.ii.271-72). Every player will eventually meet his or her match within the game and experience mastery from the disadvantaged side. Despite the emphasis on individual perceptual reality and competition, the role-setting function of societal morality is not, however, completely absent from A Mad World, My Masters, but, significantly, it is consigned to the subplot.

The Brothel/Harebrain subplot involves the oft-used story of a country gentleman attempting to cuckold a merchant-citizen through an elaborately plotted series of moves. In contrast to the main plot, the "characters and stakes they play for differ substantially. Brothel and Harebrain's game is quite serious" (Covatta 123). The increased level of solemnity derives from the relative lack of fluidity in the attitudes of the major players and the more substantial intrusion of societal constraints into the game itself. Harebrain's attitude, closely aligned with the prevailing attitude of society, is concisely expressed in the following passage:

> Your only deadly sin's adultery,
> That villainous ringworm, woman's worst requital.
> 'Tis only lechery that's damn'd to th' pit-hole;
> Ah, that's an arch-offence; believe it, squall,
> All sins are venial but venereal (I.ii.131-35).

Harebrain's rigid stance echoes the societal construction of purity and chastity imputed to the ideal wife and prefigures the societally induced transformation that will occur in Penitent Brothel. The expression of these opinions by the citizen allows Brothel, Mistress Harebrain, and Frank Gullman to determine the appropriate roles and moves necessary to defeat Master Harebrain and arrange a liaison between the country gentleman and the citizen's wife. Given the knowledge of Harebrain's expectations, the courtesan is able to assume a position of trust within the citizen's household, ironically as the faithfully moral companion to his wife. From this position, Gullman is able to instruct Mistress Harebrain in the method of deceiving her husband: "The way to daunt is to outvie suspect. / Manage these principles but with art and life, / Welcome all nations, thou'rt an honest wife" (I.ii.93-95). Through the manipulation of

appearances, the trio is able to conceal its true intent from Master Harebrain and successfully arrange a meeting between the two potential lovers.

The game that occurs in the cuckoldry subplot involves, essentially, a struggle between Master Harebrain and Penitent Brothel for control of the female body. Leinwand writes,

> Both men treat the body as an object, a sexual site, or a piece of property which is entered into a game of domination. Sexuality offers a pretext for the display of power, and as with gulling, this display takes the form of intrigue because it is so effective on the stage. . . . The will to mastery refracts conventional aspects of capitalism when it is seen as a dangerous game played for control over others as well as their resources. Sexual enslavement . . . and objectification of the body present us with yet another commodities game that, once again, serves as a structure for both the comedy and the society that the comedy depicts (57-58).

Like all other games within this play sphere, the sexual game is "a vehicle for the competitive instinct," intimately entwined with the capitalistic struggle for power and ownership (Leggatt 136). This tension underscores the relative lack of power that women command within the urban milieu, as the process of commodification denies women power over even their own bodies. Mistress Harebrain is not a true player, since she lacks real control within the game and her sexuality represents both the goal and prize in the contest being waged between her husband and Penitent Brothel. Frank Gullman, on the other hand, participates in this game as an agent in the service of Penitent Brothel, from whom she receives cash as compensation for her efforts. Within this game, Frank Gullman is still a player, attempting to attain a specific goal within the framework of rules imposed upon the competition, even though she is also

Brothel's agent. She therefore benefits indirectly, in the form of monetary remuneration, rather than directly, in the form of possession of Mistress Harebrain's sexuality, from the accomplishment of her goal. During situations, or games, involving the possession of her own body, Frank Gullman uses her sexuality as a weapon in order to gain monetary advantages. In other words, she defeats her opponents, retains control over her own body, and effectively subverts the game by replacing it with a contest involving control of more material resources in which the men pay and she wins. Characters with whom she interacts do not realize what has transpired and are unceremoniously relieved of their excess cash. Like all skilled players, Gullman is concerned with her own survival and, to this end, functions effectively in her efforts to arrange a clandestine meeting between Mistress Harebrain and Penitent Brothel. Rendezvous completed, Penitent Brothel experiences a very strange visitation and undergoes a complete transformation in his attitude toward extramarital activities.

Strangely out of place in the material world of the city comedy, the scene involving Penitent and the succubus has seemed to many readers incongruous with the rest of the play (Rowe 95). Rowe has defended this scene, stating that Penitent Brothel "is intended essentially to provide the play's most memorable commentary on the disunity of human personality" (96). Almost all of the characters in the play, Rowe maintains, "seem to be ruled by conflicting and often irreconcilable impulses" and Penitent Brothel is but the logical extension of this tendency toward personal contradiction (94). In my opinion, the discontinuity displayed by most characters in the play stems from the fluid value systems that players must adopt in order to survive within the urban arena. Skilled players must be able to adapt quickly to constantly changing situations and, therefore, must have available to them the wide range of choices that a

fluid value system affords. Rigidity translates into defeat, while fluidity and control of one's discontinuity translates into victory. In the solitary transformation of Penitent Brothel, however, fluidity gives way to the rigid societal system of sexual values espoused earlier by Master Harebrain. Alone in his chamber, Brothel undergoes his transformation while reading a book of the type used by Mistress Harebrain to deceive her husband, saying,

> Nay, I that knew the price of life and sin,
> What crown is kept for continence, what for lust,
> The end of man, and glory of that end
> As endless as the giver,
> To dote on weakness, slime, corruption, woman! (IV.i.14-18).

Through reference to the afterlife, a sphere outside the material concerns of the urban world, the dominant Christian value system intrudes upon the perceptual reality of Penitent Brothel, causing him to abandon his plans for a liaison with Mistress Harebrain. Acquiescence to the dominant value system causes Brothel to be concerned about the earthly consequences of his actions, but it is his fear of the spiritual consequences which finally causes him to change his course of action. In typically fluid form, however, Brothel shifts the blame for his past behavior from himself to the weak and corrupt woman, leaving himself cleansed and blameless within his own perceptual reality. This move transports Brothel from the seduction game and into the realm of the religious appearance, a realm with its own facades and charades. The appearance of the succubus represents a recapitulation of Brothel's new stand and a further transference of blame from himself to the woman.

Through the juxtaposition of the main plot, involving Follywit and Bounteous, with the Harebrain/Penitent subplot, Middleton is able to contrast the fluidity of values inherent in the major players of the urban gameworld with

the rigidity of societally constructed morality. Follywit is able to advance in the urban monetary game because of his ability to adapt fluidly both his appearance and his demeanor to the exigencies of each particular situation. When Follywit is eventually defeated, it is not because of the intrusion of moral rigidity, but rather it is the result of an inability to correctly assess the intentions of another player. Penitent Brothel, on the other hand, is unable to take advantage of the superior position he occupies in the conflict with Master Harebrain because of the intrusion of the moral rigidity of society into his consciousness. Brothel succumbs to the dominant value system upon consideration of the spiritual consequences of his actions, while simultaneously creating an appearance of innocence by shifting blame to the woman. Seduction is replaced by religion as Brothel accepts society's strict code of sexuality, and concurrently embraces the fluidity of religious appearance. Unlike the consummate player, Follywit, Brothel is unable to sustain a pursuit of his original goal, but instead chooses to divert his attention to another goal that involves a moral rigidity which must necessarily negate the subjective value of the original goal. Brothel is defeated because he elects to participate in a sphere which is completely incompatible with his original goal, while Follywit eventually loses because he fails to consider adequately the skill, or fluidity, of another player. As seen in both the plot and subplot of Middleton's A Mad World, My Masters, defeat is a necessary component of competitive situations and an eventuality which all players must face.

Chapter 3 - Michaelmas Term

The Jacobean city comedy arose during a period of transition from an exclusively class-based society towards a society stratified on the basis of competition. In order to survive and prosper, each member of this society, regardless of class, was forced to compete within the sphere of city life. Nowhere in the Middletonian canon is the encroachment of competition upon class more evident than in Michaelmas Term, written for Paul's Boys in approximately 1605. Competition between members of the landed gentry and members of the growing mercantile class is overtly displayed throughout this play, as players from both classes attempt to maneuver themselves into the most advantageous position. In their ludic maneuverings, however, a symbiotic relationship is evident existing between the two classes: the gallants need the mercantile class for monetary loans and the provision of necessary commodities (including their commodified female 'possessions'), while the mercantile class need the gentry as consumers and gulls for the capitalistic market machine. Middleton recognizes that two sets of rules govern this symbiotic competition. At the societal level, general choices and roles are prescribed for players by their respective class positions, while at the level of individual encounter between participants, the operative paradigm consists of a single rule -- any move is allowed that is acceptable to one's opponent in any particular encounter. With this rule in mind, players must adapt to constantly shifting relational rules of skill which determine acceptable moves in various situations. In the interaction between individual players, a liminal space is created in which class distinctions are made temporarily meaningless and are instead replaced by the peculiar skills of the urban gameworld. Perception is reality within this combative space since objective (read societal) reality no longer holds, but is replaced by a personal and subjective construct. Surface

and style, rather than substance, form the focal point of this perceptual reality which, fused with appearance and the artificiality of the urban world, supports the primacy of style over substance. Within this milieu, the dominant culture overlays both prescribed class roles for members of the society and a set of overriding cultural norms or rules, so that a thin veneer of order can be laid over the apparently anarchic actuality of the city. The important set of rules, however, is not at the macro-level of society, but at the micro-level of perceptual reality. Societal norms are being challenged, pushed and altered by the players of the game, so that the important aspect of this synthetic world is the relational character of reality. Through Michaelmas Term, Middleton explores the concept of perceptual reality within the individual competitive moment in which skill, rather than class, marks the distinguishing characteristic of a player.

In an attempt to deny the predatory nature of this environment, urban society attempts to disguise the anarchy of the city through the imposition of societal norms. Hierarchical ordering, inherent in the class system, provides the outer frame, or boundary, for the urban gameworld, but does not provide a coherently articulated system of values that is common to all classes. This world is an artificial construct in which there is no homogenous value system, but rather a set of individually fluid value systems, which exist for the purpose of self-preservation and self-justification. Values of class do not intrude upon this liminal micro-world, but commonalities do exist within this competitive gameworld, based not upon a homogenous value system, but upon the expectations, appearances, and perceptions which constitute the micro-level game. These commonalities are relational because they are based on the relations between players and on the perceptions and expectations which form reality for the other players. Since perceptual reality cannot be separated from appearance, the game's rules of skill are also, to a degree, based upon

appearance, even though these rules also control the acceptable use of appearance and style through the proscriptive expectations of one's opponent. Acceptable moves are not static, but must constantly be rediscovered by the participants. The gameworld is seemingly anarchic, but in actuality, there are rules of skill in constant relational flux. The characters who are able to discover these rules and quickly adapt to disparate situations will survive in the predatory arena of the urban ecosystem. As Anthony Covatta writes in Thomas Middleton's City Comedies, "Michaelmas Term ultimately deals with the wise and the foolish -- those who can cope with the City world, regardless of appearances, and those who cannot" (85). The transformation from a stratification of class to a stratification of competition is thus enacted within the milieu of perceptual reality. Players constantly jostle for position, struggling to transcend the class and role imposed on them by the overreaching set of societal rules and to flourish in a changing world climate.

The sphere within which the game occurs is a dark world of shifting appearances which are both governed and proscribed by the shifting rules of skill, or the shifting repertoire of acceptable moves, within the urban environment. As George E. Rowe, Jr. observes of the setting of Michaelmas Term, "chaos, confusion, and instability dominate this fallen and hellish environment" (64). He goes on to argue that Rearage, Salewood, Lethe, Easy, and the Country Wench represent prodigal figures because they "turn away from their ancestry" and through this action "reject the order and stability of the country and land for the disorder of the city" (65). I would argue, however, that prodigality is neither the dominant nor the most salient feature of these characters. While the country does represent order within the fictional world of Michaelmas Term, it is the hierarchical macro-order of class, or what Paul Yachnin terms the "sacramental" order, that is quickly fading as the sole

paradigm within the Jacobean world (87). Characters may or may not be aware of the existence or degree of competitiveness within the urban world, but each chooses the instability and disorder of the city precisely because of the possibilities that lack of stability presents. Instability implies motion, activity, turmoil, adventure, and excitement; in the midst of such ambiguity, there is tremendous opportunity to construct oneself in one's own image, rather than in the image of one's class. Cast not in the role of prodigals, these characters seek to transcend societal norms, to shape themselves and, in the process (and sometimes unwittingly), to subvert the class system by overwriting it with the competitive system.

The induction of the play makes explicit the connection between the urban world and the fallen world: "We must be civil now, and match our evil; Who first made civil black, he pleas'd the devil" (Inductio 4-5). The 'fallen' environment of the city deconstructs the binary opposition between the gentried and mercantile classes by negating class distinctions and transforming land, which constitutes the major component of this opposition, into the prize and the goal in the subversive, individualistic, and competitive sphere of the London gameworld. In other words, possession of land title, constituted solely by ownership, replaces the possession of class title, constituted solely by birth. Within the world of Michaelmas Term, competition momentarily replaces class as the dominant mode of stratification before the primacy of class is reasserted at the end of the play. Thus, Michaelmas Term follows the familiar comic pattern of initial disruption and eventual reassertion of order. In the formulaic re-establishment of order, class distinction reasserts itself as the primary determinant of stratification. The abrupt manner in which the primacy of class is reasserted provides, in the words of Jonathan Dollimore, "a perfunctory rather than a profound reassertion of order" (60). The radical inversions and

destabilizations of class hierarchy raise questions regarding the ontological status of class in the changing world of the Jacobean period. In "Social Competition in Middleton's Michaelmas Term," Yachnin writes,"Middleton's eleventh-hour reversal of the historical process his play so brilliantly records can hardly succeed in containing its violent and subversive energies" (98). Within the competitive space of the play, by being "civil," the players can discover the rules of skill within which they must play the game. Since these rules are relational and shifting, civil life is, in a sense, black or opaque, because the appropriate situational moves are not easily discovered. In this deconstructive "age for cloven creatures" (I.ii.8), Quomodo's spirits and characters with names such as Lethe and Hellgill do not appear at all out of place, but rather are endemic to the ambiguity and instability of the fictional world of the play. Despite the artificiality of the closure that reverses the fortunes of these characters, their very existence and status within the competitive microcosm of the London world represents the decline of class as the sole system of stratification and valuation, especially within the urban world.

Ironically, the attempt by members of the mercantile class to assert control over the gentry's land is also an attempt to assume the gentry's privileged class position. As Richard Levin, privileging an *a priori* conception of the complete dominance of class in the Jacobean period, writes in the introduction to the Regents edition of Michaelmas Term, Lethe and Quomodo attempt "to rise above their stations" (xx). Simultaneously, members of the gentry seek to augment their dominance in the hierarchy of class through competition in the urban gamespheres of sexual possession and monetary accumulation. Members of each class desire to emulate the position of the other in a symbiotic, or in more cynical terms, reciprocally parasitic, relationship. As Quomodo so succinctly states of the gentry, "They're busy 'bout our wives, we 'bout their

lands" (I.i.107). Players perceive that entry into the apparent chaos of the urban gameworld will allow them to attain positions of power in monetary, sexual, and, through the accumulation of gentried land, class structures. However, players are also unable to escape from the construct of the game, since societal reality is antithetical to the nature of the game that they, of their own choice, are playing. Play occurs by choice, but escape seems impossible once one has committed him or herself to the game; the game snares its participants so that they become trapped within an ever changing and perpetual contest. The players are, in the words of Thomas Pynchon, trapped "at the centre of some intricate crystal," the relational web of appearance, perception, and expectation that constitutes the gameworld's ever changing rules of proficiency; escape is impossible and 'true' reality is not easily discernible. Many moves are possible within the world of the game, but escape is not one of them.

Upon entry into the city of London, participants are trapped in a world in which perception is reality and surface and style reign over substance. Within this urban world, characters prey upon one another by using the perceptual reality of appearances. The importance is not in the character which underlies the outward appearance, but in the perception that appearance creates within both others and oneself. Identity is a matter of appearance, both through the effective use and effective subversion of societally imposed roles. Characters in Michaelmas Term achieve success by discovering the rules of skill that govern appearance in the urban gameworld; as Leinwand argues, "real success in the city requires substantial control over one's costume and actions" (101). Players must discover both which roles are appropriate in which situations and which traits are necessary to carry out these roles successfully. The strategies of appearance, however, are not static, but are in a constant state of flux as perceptions change and interactions occur between characters on different

relational levels. Players strive to alter the perceptual reality of others, and thus the parameters of the game, while simultaneously using their knowledge of the perceptual realities of other players to improve their own positions in the game. Establishing identity is an ongoing act of self-creation through which each player attempts to manipulate the discontinuity of self to greatest advantage; each player continuously rewrites the self for a disparate range of possible scenarios. "Identity," writes Rowe, "becomes a matter of appearance, or more specifically, of clothes. . . . Indeed, it may be said that the clothes literally make the man in Michaelmas Term" (65,66). Within the competitive arena of the city, clothing replaces class as the dominant constituent of identity. The deconstructive urban milieu allows each player to abrogate the position of his or her biological family within the hierarchy of class by replacing physical birth with a re-conception of identity through the medium of clothing. By giving birth to an urban manifestation of the self, each player seeks, through competition, to insert him or herself into a position of privilege within the monetary, sexual, and/or class structures.

The association between identity, appearance, and clothing is manifest from the outset of the play. Beginning with the Induction, clothing is equated with identity, as witnessed when the character Michaelmas Term says, "Give me my gown, that weed is for the country" (Inductio 3). In describing the garment of the country as a "weed," Michaelmas Term links the country, with its attendant hierarchy of class and archaism of style, with the stagnant and sterile image of a noxious plant and the concept of death, the final mode of stasis and sterility. The more formal gown, on the other hand, is used as an exterior garment by judges and other officials to show their relative positions within the metropolitan environment. In an atmosphere of "civil black," players, like Michaelmas Term, the temporal manifestation of the fictional world of the play, must adapt their

appearance, behaviour, and value systems to conform to a multitude of situations and expectations. Even at the level of the urban infrastructure, as embodied in the character of Michaelmas Term, clothing is used as a designation of rank through the impression that it creates within the city's inhabitants. Clothing aids in the establishment of identity and, through the skillful manipulation of clothing and appearance, players may, like Michaelmas Term, insert themselves into dominant positions within the relationships of power.

The association of clothing,appearance, and identity continues throughout the play, especially with regard to Andrew Lethe (nee Gruel). Rearage, in the speech that introduces Lethe to the audience, explicitly sets forth the equation of clothing to appearance to identity:

> One Andrew Lethe, crept to a little warmth,
> And now so proud that he forgets all storms;
> One that ne'er wore apparel but, like ditches,
> 'Twas cast before he had it, now shines bright
> In rich embroideries (I.i.61-65).

In the rural world, in which the hierarchy of class excludes Andrew Gruel from ever infiltrating the structures of power, Gruel neither possessed nor had need of fine clothing. However, upon entering the arena of the city, he realizes that he must control his appearance through the currency of clothing. Appearance and the manipulation of perception form the currency of transactions within the urban gameworld and combine to replace the binary opposition of class which excludes Gruel in the country. Gruel's entry into the city, then, corresponds to his reconception and reconstruction of himself through the medium of clothing. Gruel is able to discover the appropriate rules of skill with regard to the acceptable appearance of a gallant, and use this knowledge to assume the

guise, and therefore the identity, of such a gallant. With this reconceptualization of identity comes the assumption of a new name. In renaming himself, Gruel is able to appropriate control of his own identity and ameliorate the effects of the class system by asserting agency within the liminal space of the city. It should also be noted that Lethe, the name that Gruel assumes, is also the name of the river of forgetfulness in the Hades of classical mythology and Dante's Inferno. This connection is appropriate not only as a constituent part of the disruption and chaos of the city, but also as an emblem of the new player's fluidity of appearance and values. Lethe assumes his part to such an extent, however, that, as his name implies, he forgets his past identity and the fact that he is playing a role (Leinwand 99). The affectation of this single persona leaves Lethe unable to perceive other sets of relational functions involved in the game and he is consequently unable to adapt to different contextual situations. Proficiency at the game, however, involves mastery of a varied range of appropriate appearances and behaviours and lack of this proficiency dooms a player to eventual defeat. This weakness, coupled with the comic forces which drive the play towards a final reassertion of order, consigns Lethe to a very different fate than his temporary success suggests. Despite this eventuality, Andrew Gruel is initially overwritten by Andrew Lethe as city replaces country and appearance replaces heredity.

A player's ancestry presents a potential complication to the urban reconceptualization of identity because of the tenuous nature of appearance, and hence identity, within the urban sphere. Familial relationships are not a positive (nor even a neutral) force within the context of the London gameworld, but are seen as liabilities, the effects of which a player must nullify. In the Darwinian atmosphere of the game, each player strives to further his or her own position without regard to the consequences which befall other players. Within

this context, family members are nothing more than contending players for the finite stakes of the game. Clear evidence of the burden of family is given in Lethe's reaction of alarm at the entrance of his mother:

> My mother! Curse of poverty! Does she come up to shame me, to betray my birth, and cast soil upon my new suit? Let her pass me, I'll take no notice of her. Scurvy murrey kersey! (I.i.236-39).

Family, as embodied in the person of Mother Gruel, is equated with the lineage that marks an individual within the hierarchical class structure of the country. Lethe perceives that the advent of Mother Gruel into the urban realm represents a consequent intrusion of the apparatus of class. In the anonymity of the city, in which the perception of title is more consequential than its actual possession, Lethe is able to transcend the circumstances of his physical birth by constructing a new identity for himself. In assuming the appearance of a gallant, Lethe has selected a new identity that falls within the expectations of Quomodo, and therefore Lethe is able to advance temporarily in relation to that part of the game involving the draper and his daughter. Facades, however, can be exposed and it is for this reason that Lethe asserts that Mother Gruel will "stain my blood, / And drop my staining birth upon my raiment" (I.i.270-71). Appropriate to the equation of clothing with identity, Lethe conceptualizes his urban identity as both a suit and a raiment, and his physical birth as both a possible stain upon that garment and the inferior cloth of "Scurvy murrey kersey." Lethe's unwillingness to recognize his relationship to Mother Gruel and her inability to recognize her son thus represent the devalued status of family in the city.

Both affectation of urban identity through the medium of clothing and the devalued status of the family are also embodied in the person of Lethe's feminine mirror, and eventual mate, the Country Wench. Like all women within the fictional worlds of Middleton's city comedies, the status of the Country Wench is that of a market commodity which embodies both the goal and the prize in a capitalistic and masculine struggle for power and ownership. In Michaelmas Term, the Country Wench is situated positionally by her designation, but is denied the level of humanity that is conferred by the attribution of a personal name. Lethe and his agent, Hellgill, regard the Country Wench not as a player, or even a person, but instead describe her in terms of live(stock) merchandise: "Young, beautiful, and plump, a delicate piece of sin" (II.i.136). Despite the men's privately dismissive attitude towards the young woman, Hellgill entices the Country Wench to market by playing upon her desire to transcend her physical birth. In praising the urban world of appearances, Hellgill says,

> Wouldst thou, a pretty,
> beautiful, juicy squall, live in a poor thrum'd house i'th'
> country in such servile habiliments, and may well pass for a
> gentlewoman i'th' city? . . . Remember a loose bodied
> gown, wench, and let it go; wires and tires, bents and bums,
> felts and falls, thou shalt deceive the world, that gentle-
> woman indeed shall not be known from others (I.ii.3-6, 12-15).

Hellgill promises to replace her humble country clothing with attire that will transform her into the semblance of a gentlewoman. Since surface rather than substance is the dominant determinant of worth in the city, such a transformation is tantamount to the creation of a new identity that is completely independent of the Country Wench's physical birth. The lure of rebirth is

enticing to the Country Wench and she agrees to accompany Hellgill to London, saying, "If I had not a desire to go like a gentlewoman, you should be hang'd ere you should get me to't, I warrant you" (I.ii.27-28). She has been deceived with regard to the intentions of Hellgill and Lethe, but she is complicit in the conceptualization of her new urban identity. It is as commodity, then, that she enters the city, but the inherent anonymity of the city also equips her with a persona which might allow her to become a competent feminine player within the predominantly masculine game. As Hellgill later says in summary of the importance of clothing to the urban gameworld: "What base birth does not raiment make glorious? And what glorious births do not rags make infamous?" (III.i.1-3). Unfortunately, unlike Frank Gullman in A Mad World, My Masters or the Courtesan in A Trick to Catch the Old One, the Country Wench possesses neither the requisite experience nor the requisite skill to consolidate her initial position and inscribe herself into the perceptual hierarchy of the city.

In the Country Wench's attempts to assume the persona of a gentlewoman, the diminished status of the family unit is made very apparent. In a scenario which mirrors Lethe's denial of his mother, the Country Wench fails to recognize the presence of her father in the urban gameworld and, as in the case of Lethe's mother, the parent also fails to recognize the child. Unique in the canon of Middleton's city comedies, the Country Wench's father has had a ruinous prior experience in London's gameworld and, rather than wishing to avenge his prior losses through urban competition, he retreats to the stable class hierarchy of the country, harbouring a fearful loathing for the site of his downfall. He explains:

> Woe worth th'infected cause that makes me visit
> This man-devouring city, where I spent
> My unshapen youth, to be my age's curse,

> And surfeited away my name and state
> In swinish riots, that now, being sober,
> I do awake a beggar (II.ii.20-25).

The attempt to remove his daughter from the urban milieu is an attempt to re-establish both the patriarchal order of the family unit and the hierarchy of class that is built upon recognition of the patrilineal family unit. In essence, the Country Wench's father comes to the city to reclaim the object that is his property under the patriarchal system of class. The anonymity and competition of the urban environment, however, deconstructs the binary opposition of parent/child, thus denying the possibility of recognition and the consequent re-integration of the family unit. The father's mission is thwarted, while the Country Wench remains unaware of the imminent threat to her newly created urban identity. Neither father nor daughter is an adept player, but both at least recognize the existence of the competition that is an inherent component of urban life.

Richard Easy, on the other hand, enters the realm of the game with no apparent knowledge that the game even exists. He is a man of the country, a member of the landed gentry thoroughly grounded in the ideology of class, and one who does not perceive that there are sets of relational rules of skill to be discovered and used in the urban world. London is not Easy's element, but, as Cockstone says to him, "now your father's dead, 'tis your only course" (I.i.43). Why is there no option open to him other than entry into the dangerous metropolis? What is it about London that lures Easy from the country and the secure class position which he enjoys there? He is drawn to the excitement, adventure, and instability of the city because these qualities represent everything that is antithetical to the rigid order of country life. The city is a site of exploration, an unknown which must be experienced. Entrenched players,

however, realize Easy's naivete, giving them a distinct advantage in their interactions with him. Easy is unable to penetrate the (dis)guises of the other players and does not realize that he must adapt both his appearance and his behaviour to specific game situations. His inexperience is noted by Cockstone, who remarks, "he is yet fresh,/ And wants city powd'ring" (I.i.55-56) and Quomodo, who states, "he's fresh and free" (I.i.117), implying an ignorance of the game and an accompanying level of vulnerability. London draws Easy into its chaotic vortex by promising the excitement and adventure of instability. Unfortunately for Easy, however, instability also implies risk, the ramifications of which he does not have the necessary attributes or experience to combat.

Easy's entrance into the game does not go unnoticed by the predators of this Darwinian urban environment, but is carefully noted by Ephestian Quomodo, who, as an urban player, is appropriately a draper. Having just returned from a journey to Essex, Quomodo tells his agent, Shortyard, that the object of his desires lies in that county, to which Shortyard responds, "What is the mark you shoot at?" (I.i.102). In his answer, Quomodo extends the metaphor of archery and then shifts to the metaphor of fishing:

> Why, the fairest to cleave the heir in twain,
> I mean his title; to murder his estate,
> Stifle his right in some detested prison.
> There are means and ways to hook in gentry (I.i.102-05).

By plotting to "murder" Easy's estate, and thus negate his title, or position of class privilege, Quomodo anticipates his acquisition of the legal land title to Easy's country estate. Beginning with these words, the predatory Darwinism of Michaelmas Term is persistently emphasized through the constant use of hunting and predatory imagery. During the course of the play, Quomodo calls the gentry "the chief fish we tradesmen catch" (I.i.132) and refers to Easy as

both a "buck to be struck" (II.iii.77) and a "hungry fish" (II.iii.200). At other points in the play, Easy is also referred to as a "trout" (II.iii.140) and a bird with "wings clip'd" (III.ii.21). The image of the net is also used to reinforce both the predatory and entrapment aspects of the deadly game of the urban world. For example, when Shortyard fears that Easy will not sign the guarantee for Blastfield's debt, he says that "the net's broke" (II.iii.276). The surface imagery is that of the hunt and the entrapment of prey by the hunter, metaphorically supporting the theme of perceptual Darwinism, the key element of the urban gameworld. As seen above, another kind of entrapment also occurs within the context of the gameworld: the players themselves become trapped within the urban milieu. The net symbolizes this entrapment within the relational net of shifting rules of skill. Just as individual players within the game attempt to ensnare other players, so the game itself ensnares all players.

Ensnared by London's centripetal force, Easy is seen as prey to be captured by other players in the urban gameworld and is hunted for the bounty of his land. Hunting cannot occur without prey, as there must necessarily be both the hunter and the hunted, but these roles may shift relationally, depending on the perceptual reality of the players. That is, the hunter may at some point become the hunted or may even simultaneously be both hunter and hunted; the binary opposition between the two positions is not absolute, but fluid and dependent upon perception. Quomodo embodies the former portion of this concept, as he moves, through his 'death', from the role of hunter to the role of the hunted. In his contest with Easy, Quomodo occupies the dominant position, according to his own perceptual reality. Through his fictional death, however, Quomodo is trapped by the moves of other players in the game who do not act in accordance with his expectations and perceptions. The city is a predatory, Darwinian environment in which one's position is always relative to the

positions of others in the game. True to the nature of the urban gameworld, the distinction between hunter and hunted is extremely ambiguous.

Despite the ambiguity inherent in this predatory opposition, at the beginning of the play Quomodo clearly feels that he is in control, that Easy, true to his name, will be a naive and passive victim, and that the acquisition of the lands will be achieved without delay. In order to accomplish his goal, Quomodo devises an elaborate swindle, incorporating deception, disguise, and the insinuation of Shortyard (in the guise of Blastfield) into Easy's confidence. Quomodo instructs Shortyard:

> Shift thyself speedily into the shape of gallantry;
> I'll swell thy purse with angels.
> Keep foot by foot with him, out-dare his expenses,
> Flatter, dice, and brothel to him;
> Give him a sweet taste of sensuality;
> Train him to every wasteful sin, that he
> May quickly need health, but especially money . . .
> Kiss him and undo him, my sweet spirit (I.i.118-24, 128).

Quomodo's plan is to take advantage of Easy's lack of knowledge about the urban gameworld by demonstrating the pleasures of the city and teaching him about "every wasteful sin," while denying him information about the relational rules of skill that are necessary for survival in the city. Through his shape-shifting agent, Shortyard, Quomodo is able to circumvent part of the game by actually writing, or inscribing, Easy's expectations, rather than discerning them and adopting the appropriate combative strategies. The contest is inequitable from the outset because of the information gap that exists between Easy and Quomodo. Not only does Easy lack information about the game's rules and rules of skill, but he is not even privy to the knowledge that the game exists.

Quomodo and Shortyard can thus furnish misleading and potentially disastrous information about appropriate urban behaviour to the credulous Easy. To this end, Shortyard, in the guise of Blastfield, tells Easy, "You must always have a care of your reputation here in town" (II.i.36-37). From this initial inscription of attitude and expectation, Shortyard lays the groundwork for the eventual defeat and capture of his master's prey.

Quomodo's final trap for Easy consists of a commodities swindle, appropriately involving cloth, the basic building block of urban identity, representing a large number of alterations in identity on the part of the conspirators. Blastfield/Shortyard offers to secure the capital necessary for Easy's proposed supper for the gallants by borrowing money from Quomodo the draper. Quomodo, in turn, claims that at present he has no liquid capital, but that in three days he will have access to an abundance of ready cash. This news, however, does not placate Easy, who has been inculcated with a false code of urban hospitality and who does not suspect that his reaction forms a part of Quomodo's plot. Easy, echoing the sentiments with which he has been indoctrinated, exclaims, "it stands upon the loss of my credit tonight, if I walk without money" (II.iii.150-51). Under the influence of the myth of urban hospitality, Easy overcomes the feigned objections of Blastfield and persuades him to accept the immediate offer of the draper's commodity, which, in theory, the two could then sell. Easy also indignantly objects to Quomodo's affected reluctance to accept the signature of a non-citizen as guarantor of the contract, "but for custom sake" (II.iii.240). In fact, the acquisition of Easy's signature on this document is the objective of this segment of Quomodo's plan. Falselight, posing as Master Idem, another fictional extension of Quomodo, then buys the fabric at a fraction of its market value. Blastfield then disappears, leaving the burden of the debt to Easy. A final ruse, in which Shortyard and Falselight each

assume two new guises, convinces Easy to forfeit his land in order to avoid debtor's prison. The trap is closed, Easy is caught, and Quomodo receives his prize, which constitues the spoils of the hunt: Easy's land. Easy, however, does not learn from his urban experience and is never completely able to comprehend the game. It is for this reason that he moves not from the role of the hunted to the hunter, but rather from the role of hunted, in relation to Quomodo, to the role of pawn, in relation to Quomodo's wife, Thomasine.

Even before Easy's capitulation, Quomodo becomes preoccupied with the land and its significance. Upon hearing news of Easy's arrest, Quomodo fantasizes triumphantly to himself,

> Now shall I be divulg'd a landed man
> Throughout the Livery; one points, another whispers,
> A third frets inwardly, let him fret and hang! . . .
> Now come my golden days in.
> --Whither is the worshipful Master Quomodo and his
> fair bedfellow rid forth? --To his land in Essex! --Whence
> comes those goodly load of logs? --From his land in Essex!
> --Where grows this pleasant fruit? says one citizen's wife
> in the Row. --At Master Quomodo's orchard in Essex.
> --Oh, oh, does it so? I thank you for that good news, i'faith (III.iv.5-7,12-18).

For Quomodo, the acquisition of Easy's land represents not only a victory in the sphere of material accumulation, but also an opportunity to assume Easy's privileged class position. Land, one of the major components of the binary opposition of class, becomes a site of contestation and forms the goal and the prize in the encounter between Quomodo and Easy. Quomodo, however, is not content with the mere possession of this land. Rather, he seeks to inscribe

himself into a privileged position within the perceptual realities of the other urban players. The deconstructive atmosphere of the city has itself transformed land into a site of material competition and negated its value as indicator of position within the hierarchy of class. By substituting land title for class title, Quomodo is attempting to reformulate the binary opposition with himself in the dominant position. Through the dominance of this new position, Quomodo also perceives that the land will ultimately offer a means of retreat or retirement from the urban gameworld, with "the very thought of green fields [putting] a man into sweet inventions" (IV.i.79-80). Although Quomodo repositions land as the most significant indicator of status in his new hierarchy, the basis of this new stratification is competition rather than class. In effect, Quomodo's acquisition of Easy's land represents the acquisition and reformulation of Easy's class position. Unfortunately for Quomodo, he remains unsatisfied even with this victory and its attendant position of privilege and consequent avenue of retirement.

The confines of the comedic tradition demand that the order which is supplanted at the outset of the play must be restored by the conclusion. In addition, in the early seventeenth-century a high degree of risk accompanies a playwright who suggests a complete displacement of class as the central determinant of stratification. Therefore, some mechanism must be introduced through which the master player Quomodo may be defeated. In true Middletonian irony, the author of this mechanism is Quomodo himself, who plots to stage his own death and "in disguise note the condition of all" (IV.i.104-05). Unlike other expert players in the canon of Middleton's city comedies, Quomodo is not defeated through the actions of an opponent whom he misjudges and underestimates in the course of an encounter. On the contrary, Quomodo's defeat occurs because Middleton creates for him an extremely imprudent plot

that will benefit him neither materially nor with regard to perceptual position. His attempt to implement this ludicrous scheme is clearly not the type of move associated with a player of his calibre and, I would argue, it is so far removed from the sphere of the master player that it is manifestly artificial. In addition, Easy does not learn from his mistakes and use this knowledge to defeat Quomodo, as Covatta argues, but instead becomes the pawn of Thomasine, who takes full advantage of her husband's 'death.' At the play's conclusion, we are presented with the figure of the judge, the Michaelmas Term of the Induction and final arbiter of an order which, in the early seventeenth-century, can have but one final form. By presenting the mechanism of Quomodo's downfall in such a blatantly artificial manner, Middleton forces the audience to reflect upon both the events of the play and the reason for this artificial closure. Class is restored to the dominant position not through any inherent right, but through the artificial closure imposed by the playwright. Middleton is not "doubly indecisive," as Yachnin writes, about the relative positions of class and competition (89). Rather, in keeping with the spirit of Michaelmas Term, only the appearance of order is restored, while the subversive themes of the entire play reverberate in the minds of the audience.

Perceptual reality is the dominant characteristic of this urban gameworld, a liminal space in which the hierarchy of class is momentarily deconstructed and replaced by competitive stratification. Michaelmas Term constitutes an intricate game with shifting relational rules of skill, based upon expectations, appearances, and perceptions which must be discovered by a player in order for him or her to advance. Players who are able to discover these rules and adapt to the differing sets of rules advance within this environment, while those who cannot both discover the rules and adapt to them will, at worst, become prey and, at best, become mere pawns in the game. The game is perpetual and

it is virtually impossible for a player to emerge from the urban gameworld once entry has occurred. This artificial gameworld, in which perception constitutes reality, represents the transition from stratification to competition, the pushing back of the frontiers of societally constructed norms. Despite the artificial restoration of order at the play's conclusion, the urban world of Michaelmas Term is a dangerous environment of competition in which the ruling dictum is 'look out for number one.' In its portrayal of urban life, Michaelmas Term questions the ontological status of class in the Jacobean period and raises the subversive issue of the relationship between the hierarchies of class and competition. Like no other play in the canon of Middleton's city comedies, Michaelmas Term questions the primacy of the class structure and tentatively posits a paradigm shift from class to competitive stratification.

Chapter 4 - A Trick to Catch the Old One

Thought by many critics to be the last of the city comedies that Middleton wrote for the Children of Paul's before the company's dissolution in 1606, A Trick to Catch the Old One represents a synthesis of both the plots and thematic concerns of A Mad World, My Masters and Michaelmas Term. As in these plays, within the compass of A Trick to Catch the Old One the competitive arena of the urban milieu remains the dominant feature. More than a mere setting in these plays, the city assumes the agency of a character who remains in the background, but nonetheless has a significant hand in the outcome of the action. As the economic and social centre of England, London inexorably lures humanity from all classes into its net of competitive human relations and conflicting systems of value. Once drawn into this artificial ecosystem, characters are forced either to become players in the urban gameworld or human fodder for the voracious appetite of London and its predators. In the words of P. K. Ayers, "both the predator and victim are, in the end, cogs in an urban machine over which neither exerts any particular control" (12). No player can affect the game at the macro-level, but must, instead, focus his or her efforts in the individual spectrum, and thus become an agent of the "urban machine." Some characters, such as Richard Easy in Michaelmas Term, who are unable to adapt to this artificial environment, are consumed by the city and its denizens. These non-players are seldom able to overcome the resulting financial and psychological loss and are unlikely to re-enter the game in any capacity other than subordinate agent to a skilled player. Other characters, such as Richard Follywit in A Mad World, My Masters, who are able to adapt expertly to the urban gameworld, become elite players who, at the macro-level, act as the cogs within Ayers's urban machine. These players are susceptible, however, to eventual defeat because such defeat exists only as an abstract concept that is

not a possibility for them within their perceptual realities. A Trick to Catch the Old One, however, offers a notable exception to these models in the persons of Witgood and the Courtesan. Through Witgood's original scheme, or trick, and the subsequent degree of entropy engendered by this initial move, Middleton is able to fuse and transform his previous representations of the city. According to Alexander Leggatt in Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare, this is a play "in which the intrigue provokes a more complex response, combining the sporting pleasure of the game itself with a commentary on the society in which the game is played" (55). With A Trick to Catch the Old One, Middleton is thus able to build upon his earlier work and begin to move toward his final delineation of the urban milieu in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.

Like Easy in Michaelmas Term, Witgood naively enters the urban arena and is promptly cheated out of his property because he is unaware that the game even exists. Lucre is able to play upon Witgood's youthful excesses, such as lechery and dicing, and credulity in order to defeat him in their initial encounter. In fact, within his own perceptual reality, Lucre transforms the means of cozening into a justification for that cozening. Lucre explains,

> Must sin in him call up shame in me? Since we have
> no part in their follies, why should we have part in their infamies? . . . I saw neither hope of his reclaiming nor comfort in his being, and was it not better bestow'd upon his uncle than upon one of his aunts? I need not say 'bawd', for everyone knows what 'aunt' stands for in the last translation (II.i.4-5, 7-9).

In Lucre's mind, Witgood's folly is ample justification for the swindle through which he deprives his nephew of all income. Lucre's morals of convenience enable him to adapt his ethical stance to suit his present personal agenda; in this case, a morally indignant stance is necessary to justify his actions. As a

skilled player in the urban gameworld, Lucre is quickly able to tailor his professed values to virtually any situation that may arise. It is thus significant that Lucre uses the term "translation" to describe this speech in which he translates, or reconstructs, both the story and his morality to conform to his perception of the current situation. Lucre is the embodiment of London opportunism; consequently, he is easily able to defeat Witgood during his nephew's initial foray into the city. Unlike Easy, however, Witgood learns from his earlier defeat and is able to incorporate into his own repertoire the very strategies and weapons that have been used against him, and, unlike the Country Wench's father in Michaelmas Term, he is more than willing to re-enter the urban arena. With the onset of this play, Witgood's days of being mastered end and his days of mastery begin.

From the outset of A Trick to Catch the Old One, Witgood uses the knowledge gained during his earlier defeat to exchange the inferior and impotent position of gull, as represented in Easy in Michaelmas Term, for the potentially superior position of player, as exemplified by Follywit in A Mad World, My Masters. With the memory of his recent defeat still fresh in his head, Witgood is able to avoid Follywit's errors and recognize the deceptive potential and stratagems of all actors in the competitive urban environment. As Ayers writes, Witgood "triumphs because he is able to turn to his own advantage the very qualities of city life that had earlier threatened his very existence" (11). Consequently, Witgood does not experience the mental lapse of misrecognition that eventually causes Follywit's downfall. Before Witgood can even enter the game, however, he must first realize that the power to regain his lost estate lies within himself and his own intelligence, and that the London playing field represents the only viable sphere in which to exercise his power. Although Witgood resists, he is inexorably drawn to the site of his former defeat since he

must cross into the realm of the city in order to continue his pursuit of his love Joyce, the niece of his uncle's long-time adversary, Walkadine Hoard. In soliloquy Witgood says,

> I dare not visit the City; there I should be too soon visited by that horrible plague, my debts, and by that means I lose a virgin's love, her portion, and her virtues. Well, how should a man live now that has no living? (I.i.16-19).

He acknowledges that his prior debts represent a plague that could again be visited upon him if he attempts to resume his former life in London. Renewal of the deficit plague translates into potential defeat for Witgood in one sphere, since the exposure of his debts will jeopardize his union with Joyce. This young woman embodies both prize and goal in Witgood's game: the capture of Joyce is the goal and her love is, in one sense, the prize. However, the prize for the fulfillment of that goal also entails an element of monetary consideration. With the dissolution of his estate, Witgood is forced to rely upon his wits and the experience of his previous London venture to support himself. All schemes, however, including the procurement of Joyce, are contingent upon his presence within the urban gameworld. As Covatta points out, "Wit is better than riches because it gets gold while gold cannot get wit" (106). It is in London that players make their tricks come to fruition by making "their wits their mercers" and it is to this setting that Witgood must return in order to throw off the robes of gull and don the mask of player.

Witgood's actual conception of the "trick" occurs almost instantaneously upon recognition of the need for planned re-entry into the sphere of the urban gameworld. He is interrupted in his musings by the Courtesan who enters calling out, "My love," to which Witgood replies "My loathing!" (I.i.25-26). In the span of five lines, he goes on to call her both "the secret consumption of my

purse" and "round-webbed tarantula / That driest the roses in the cheeks of youth," emphasizing the vitriolic feeling that he has for her as representative of his initial defeat in the London arena. Through the predatory image of the spider, Witgood associates the Courtesan with the web of intrigue in which he was ensnared and which eventually led to the loss of his estate, but through which he also learned the necessary lessons for his eventual re-entry into that world. Faced with these insults, the Courtesan counters with a contemporary truism: "Lands mortgag'd may return, and more esteem'd, / But honesty once pawn'd is ne'er redeem'd" (I.i.33-34). Although the Courtesan may have played a part in his defeat, Witgood was likewise instrumental in her downfall through his capture of her virginity. This commodity is physically irretrievable, unlike Witgood's mortgaged lands, but its loss can nonetheless be redressed by stratagems within the urban environment. Her rebuke compels Witgood to focus once more on the necessity of a plot. As a result, he apologizes to the Courtesan, who he needs for his plan to come to fruition. As she is about to leave, Witgood implores, "Stay, best invention, stay," understating the plot's necessary directorial connection between the two of them (I.i.38). A few lines later, he admonishes her to help him: "Fate has so cast it that all my means I must derive from thee" (I.i.43-44) By means of a dicing metaphor, Witgood communicates his perception that he must, with her help as his partner, make the best of his situation. To use a metaphor from another game, Witgood must play and make the best of the cards that Fate deals. In playing this hand, he now understands the rules of the game and has acquired a degree of strategic potentiality. He is also not alone, but enters the fray as the head of a team.

As in A Mad World, My Masters and Michaelmas Term, the protagonist's plot depends upon the ability to adapt quickly to the expectations and perceptions of one's adversaries. Prior experience has taught both Witgood

and the Courtesan the fundamental ability to adapt to unforeseen situations, through mastery of appearance and fluidity of values. Appearance and ethics are not static constants, but are instead constantly changing situational variables. In Covatta's words, "If trickery is the only avenue open to respectability, they embark on it but do not call it the moral high road. They know how to function in a world where ideal moral standards do not and cannot apply" (117). The Courtesan realizes that she must play the role of Witgood's agent and aptly demonstrates an awareness of her position in her initial acceptance of Witgood's proposal: "What lies within the power of my performance / Shall be commanded of thee" (I.i.46-47). After Witgood has elaborated his plan, the Courtesan expands this delineation of her role within the game, saying,

> Arm your wits then speedily; there shall want nothing in
> me, either in behaviour, discourse, or fashion, that shall discredit your intended purpose.
> I will so artfully disguise my wants
> And set so good a courage on my state
> That I will be believed (I.i.66-71).

The Courtesan boasts, and later demonstrates, that through art and disguise, she will be able to assume the form, manners, and vocabulary of a wealthy widow. Prior experience in the city has given her both knowledge of the game and the necessary tools for a successful renewal of combat. Cooperation with Witgood allows her to re-enter the urban arena in an advantageously positioned role that will allow her to exercise her now considerable skill. Witgood, like his agent the Courtesan, recognizes the abundance of opportunities that the city represents and the centrality of appearances inherent in all such opportunities. The Host, in reply to Witgood's entreaties, shows

himself also to be a comrade in deceit and a willing, though not fully aware, agent in Witgood's scheme. He says, "Wilt thou command me now? I am thy spirit, conjure me into any shape" (I.ii.20-21). Preparation, art, and form not only represent the keys to Witgood's success in recruiting the Host, but also underpin his success in the London gameworld.

The affectation of an alternate identity, both in appearance and behavior, is easily accommodated within the densely populated metropolis. As Margot Heinemann writes in Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts,

> In the country, where everyone knows everyone else, Witgood is known to be ruined, greeted as 'Bully Hadland'. But in the anonymity of the city his standing depends on what people *think* he is, Witgood of Witgood Hall, finely dressed and about to marry a rich widow (97).

The operative sphere within the city is not an objective reality, but rather a reality based upon the individual perceptions of the inhabitants of the city. Inherent anonymity in the city allows the skilled player to assume whatever role is appropriate to each particular situation and to every opponent's perceptual reality. In fact, Witgood learns from past experience to such an extent that "the anonymity and social flux of the city that nearly swallow[s] him up also prove[s] his salvation" (Ayers 11). Since neither the Courtesan's nor Witgood's current status is widely known in the city, as it is in the country, the two conspirators are able to effect a renewed entry into the urban world in the most advantageous of all possible guises: wealthy widow and handsome young suitor. Based upon Witgood's evaluation of Lucre's perceptions, wants, and expectations, this choice of roles represents the pair's first move in their trick to catch the old one. As Witgood astutely notes, "the report of this fortune, well and cunningly carried, might be a means to draw some goodness from the usuring rascal" (I.ii.34-36).

Once set in motion, however, the plot gathers considerable force, creating unintended ripples in other spheres of the urban gameworld.

One of the unintended results of Witgood's new initiative is that it becomes enmeshed with the ongoing battle between Lucre and Hoard. The feud between these two old usurers, who throughout the play refer to one another as "my adversary" and "my enemy," extends from a previous encounter in which the two battled over the prize of Witgood's fortune. Without referring to Witgood by name, Hoard's brother briefly sums up the history of the old men's enmity in a conversation with Limber. Onesiphorous Hoard aptly describes his brother and Lucre as two "mortal adversaries" and "tough old spirits," a phrase which emphasizes their enduring ability to shift shapes. In addition, Onesiphorous theorizes that their anger keeps them alive. I believe, however, that this anger is but the outward manifestation of an inner competitive fire that burns within the two competitors. Throughout their lives, each has successfully gambled with his fortune within the London gameworld, engaging myriad opponents of varying levels of skill. As Richard Levin points out, their careers parallel the career of Harry Dampit, whose "descent punctuate[s] the steps in Witgood's ascent, which coincide necessarily with the steps in the comic downfall of his two victims" (147). Unlike Dampit, however, who has lost his competitive fire and now resides in a world of perpetual past glory, the two veteran players have found in each other an equal match and a competitive purpose beyond the monetary value of any prize. In their initial encounter, Lucre's move with regard to his nephew was illegal in Hoard's view, not because it was unfamilial and mercenary, but because it represented an unacceptable breach of Hoard's gamesphere. Despite individual interpretations of the move, this "foul" serves as ongoing impetus for a perpetual competition of evenly matched adversaries. The importance of this adversarial

relationship cannot be overstressed as it subsumes all other concerns for the two old men and blinds them to attacks from other quadrants of the urban gameworld.

Lucre and Hoard's association, however, is marked by an element of childish singlemindedness and spite, recognized by many characters in the play. As Onesiphorous says, "they seldom meet, but fight," a tendency towards conflict which is often manifest in juvenile name-calling. For example, when the two meet in Act I, Scene iii, their encounter soon degenerates to this adolescent level of discourse:

> HOARD: I will so cross thee--
>
> LUCRE: And I thee.
>
> HOARD: So without mercy fret thee--
>
> LUCRE: So monstrously oppose thee--
>
> HOARD: Dost scoff at my just anger? O that I had as much power as usury
>
> has over thee!
>
> LUCRE: Then thou wouldst have as much power as the Devil has over thee!
>
> HOARD: Toad!
>
> LUCRE: Aspic!
>
> HOARD: Serpent!
>
> LUCRE: Viper!

As in the case of a pair of adolescents, the object of this linguistic competition of simple insults is to speak the last word or to hurl the last verbal barb. Pride will not allow either man to concede even the minor defeat of being denied the final insult; the exchange ends only because Lamprey and Spitchcock, acting like a referee in a boxing match, forcibly separate the two men from their clinch of

words. Both Lucre and Hoard suffer from a type of tunnel vision which forces them to view everything in terms of their specific competition; because of this myopic world view, even simple encounters degenerate into bouts of juvenile argument and mutual baiting. Their focused, mutual antagonism has shrunk the whole of the London gameworld to a single competitive relationship. This singularity of focus leads to pathetically trivial outlets of competition, with each man simply trying to vex the other in some way. Knowledge of this relationship and the extent of its importance allows Witgood and the Courtesan to manipulate the two old usurers.

The plot to regain Witgood's lost lands from his uncle is set in motion when the Host, in the guise of a serving-man, is first presented to Lucre. In order to pre-empt any possible suspicion about his reasons for coming to Lucre, the Host launches into immediate explanation of his purpose: "Faith, sir, I am sent from my mistress to any sufficient gentleman indeed, to ask advice upon a doubtful point. 'Tis indifferent, sir, to whom I come, for I know none, nor did my mistress direct me to any particular man, for she's as mere a stranger here as myself" (II.i.20-23). In this brief verbal move, the Host flatters Lucre, reveals a lack of knowledge about the city in both himself and his mistress, and offers a disclaimer in order to forestall any thoughts in Lucre of premeditated motives. This initial combination of strategies is very effective in the establishment of the Host's guise and trustworthiness, as seen when Lucre says in separate asides, "A good blunt honesty; I like him well" and "This fellow's worth a matter of trust"(II.i.26, 124). After this initial move, the Host goes on to introduce the topic of his mistress, the Widow Medler. Lucre does not at first remember this widow, but this aberration of memory is soon corrected by the Host's indication that she is a *rich* widow of Staffordshire. Lucre then exclaims, "Cuds me, there 'tis indeed. Thou hast put me into memory; there's a widow indeed! Ah, that I were

a bachelor again!" (II.i.36-37). Indeed, the Host does put Lucre into memory of the widow. However, the Host does not aid in Lucre's recollection of a lost acquaintance, but rather implants the memories of a fictional widow, whom Lucre will actualize through his own delusional greed. Witgood has briefed his agent on his uncle's expectations and perceptual reality and, therefore, the Host realizes that the mention of money will cause Lucre to feign remembrance of the Widow Medler in order to position himself for a possible game involving her money. Witgood, through the agency of the Host, is thus able to manipulate the old usurer, but is able to make it appear to Lucre that he is actually in control of the situation. Lucre's perceptual reality blinds him to the objective reality that he is, in fact, the mark of a trick.

In accordance with Witgood's plan, Lucre's countermove in the exchange with the Host is to attempt to glean more information from the Widow Medler's "serving-man." After the Host introduces the topic of Witgood, in an aside Lucre exclaims, "My nephew, by th' mass, my nephew! I'll fetch out more of this, i'faith; a simple country fellow, I'll work't out of him" (II.i.53-54). Since he has previously been able to swindle Witgood, Lucre welcomes an increase in the fortunes of his nephew and, because of his experience in the urban gameworld, assumes that he is manipulating the Host into imparting information about that potential fortune. Lucre admits to a knowledge of Witgood because he perceives that such a move would be to his advantage, but he does not admit to a blood relationship until such disclosure is absolutely necessary. In reply to Lucre's assertion of Witgood's rank and lands, the Host says, "Is he so sir? To see how rumour will alter! Trust me, sir, we heard once he had no lands, but all lay mortgag'd to an uncle he has in town here" (II.i.92-94). The Host is so insistent in this report that Lucre realizes he must confess to being Witgood's uncle in order to forestall the damage and save Witgood's potential fortune for

future cozening. Upon hearing this admission, the Host counterfeits shock, saying,

> I do beseech you, sir, do me the favour to conceal it. What a beast was I to utter so much! Pray, sir, do me the kindness to keep it in; I shall have my coat pull'd o'er my ears an't should be known; for the truth is, an't please your worship, to prevent much rumour and many suitors, they intend to be married very suddenly and privately (II.i.108-12).

In his fabrication of astonishment and professed desire to avoid punishment, the Host further establishes his credibility in the eyes of the old usurer. This apparent discovery also allows the Host to let the "truth" appear to slip out, though the eventual communication of this information is, in fact, a very integral component of Witgood's plan. Ironically, this statement does represent the truth for the Host since he too believes that Witgood is to marry the fictional Widow Medler. Witgood has duped the Host into acting as an agent in the plot, just as the Host in turn dupes Lucre into believing in the veracity of both his identity and his story. Like Follywit, Lucre is duped because he mistakenly assumes that he is always the superior player in any given encounter and, in his complacency, he fails to discern the illusion of the host's appearance from the reality of his character.

Although Lucre fantasizes that "some of the widow's lands too may one day fall upon me," his chief interest in showing apparent support for his nephew remains enmeshed within his adversarial relationship with Hoard (II.i.154-55). Alone on the stage, Lucre muses,

> [Witgood] knows my humour; I am not so usually good; 'tis no small thing that draws kindness from me; he may know that, and he will. The chief cause that invites me to do him most good is the sudden

> astonishing of old Hoard, my adversary. How pale his malice will look at my nephew's advancement! With what a dejected spirit he will behold his fortunes, whom but last day he proclaimed rioter, penurious makeshift, despised brothel-master! Ha, ha! 'Twill do me more secret joy than my last purchase, more precious comfort than all these widows' revenues (II.i.171-79).

Witgood's actual advancement is of little concern to Lucre and the aid that he plans to offer his nephew is designed only to make Witgood "rich enough in words" (II.i.152-53). For Lucre, appearance is the key component, both in showing wealth to the Widow Medler and in flaunting Hoard's expectations. Thus, in the linguistic creation of an affluent facade for Witgood, Lucre expects to solidify his position in two gamespheres with but a single move. Any monetary advancement on the part of Witgood signifies to Lucre the prize in their eventual rematch. More importantly, such an advancement on the part of his nephew represents a hit in the perpetual contest between Lucre and his adversary, Hoard. Their private game has become so all-encompassing for the two men that every aspect of their lives becomes a competitive outlet to vex the other player. Through his knowledge of Lucre's expectations and perceptions, Witgood is consciously able to manipulate and cozen his uncle by allowing Lucre the delusion of control. Hoard's reaction to these developments, however, is not consciously integrated into the fabric of the plot and it is therefore an unanticipated opportunity that presents itself in Hoard's attempts to win the Widow Medler/Courtesan for himself.

Upon hearing of the entry of a rich widow into the confines of the city, Moneylove decides to dispatch with his pursuit of Joyce, Hoard's niece, in order to hunt the perceived new game, the Widow Medler. Unfortunately for

Moneylove, he chooses to enlist Hoard's aid in defaming the character of Witgood to the widow. As Moneylove leaves, Hoard gleefully exclaims,

> Fool, thou hast left thy treasure with a thief, to trust a widower with a suit in love! Happy revenge, I hug thee! I have not only the means laid before me extremely to cross my adversary and confound the last hopes of his nephew, but thereby to enrich my state, augment my revenues, and build mine own fortunes greater, ha, ha! (II.ii.39-43).

In a speech which closely parallels Lucre's earlier explication of goals, Hoard predicts that this happy confluence of occurrences will allow him both to cross his adversary and increase his own state. Through his identification of the widow as treasure, Hoard transforms the widow into a commodity whose capture delineates both the goal and the prize in his new game. Within Hoard's perceptual reality, marriage to the widow represents victory in a capitalistic struggle for ownership and control of the female body. As in A Mad World, My Masters and Michaelmas Term, in A Trick to Catch the Old One the female body is but another site in the struggle for urban power. Through this commodification process, few women are able to maintain control over even their own bodies. For example, the Country Wench of Michaelmas Term and Mistress Harebrain of A Mad World, My Masters are denied virtually all agency and are consigned to the role of prized object and commodity within the urban world. Strong female players, such as Frank Gullman in A Mad World, My Masters and the Courtesan in A Trick to Catch the Old One, are able to turn this process of objectification to their advantage through skillful manipulation of male expectations of femininity. Under the guise of rich widow, the Courtesan utilizes her position as privileged commodity within the game to lure Hoard into her web. Hoard perceives that attainment of the Widow Medler is the means to sexual and monetary advancement, as well as an opportunity to score a hit on

Lucre. In fact, Hoard is so obsessed with the ongoing contest between himself and his old opponent that, while he is the only character on stage, he boasts about the enormity of his fortune in comparison with Lucre. From earlier experience in the urban gameworld, however, the Courtesan is able to invert the binary opposition of gender and score a victory over Hoard, while simultaneously maintaining the facade that it is Hoard who in fact triumphs.

Witgood's original scheme is not fully contained within his relationship with Lucre, but rather the reverberations are felt throughout the system of the urban gameworld. Witgood, the Courtesan, Hoard, Lucre, and, to a lesser extent, Moneylove all seize upon the opportunities presented by Witgood's initial move in various ways and with varying degrees of success, depending both on each player's degree of skill and knowledge of the intricacies of Witgood's plot. Skill coupled with information ensures players the greatest degree of success within the urban gameworld; from the outset Hoard and Lucre are at a disadvantage because they both lack the inside information possessed by Witgood and the Courtesan and therefore underestimate the skill of these opponents. Inside information allows the Host to benefit to a limited extent, but it is also clear that he himself has been tricked by Witgood and the Courtesan and is being used as a pawn, or agent of partial knowledge, in their contests with Hoard and Lucre. Complete access to information is the ultimate trump card in the arena of A Trick to Catch the Old One and is possessed only by Witgood and his female equivalent, the Courtesan.

Ironically, Hoard perceives that he plays the role of informant to the Widow Medler, who allows him to occupy this fictional space in order to manipulate his actions and the outcome of the plot. By imparting incriminating information about Witgood, his perceived rival, Hoard attempts to advance himself in both the sexual and monetary spheres of the London gameworld,

while simultaneously beguiling his old adversary Lucre. This information is, of course, known to the Widow/Courtesan. Moreover, the outcome which Hoard hopes to achieve in marrying the Widow is precisely the goal of *her* machinations. As he attempts to persuade the Widow of Witgood's infamy, Hoard employs several Gentlemen as agents, both to corroborate his testimony and aid in her capture. After destroying Witgood's fictitious credibility, Hoard urges the Gentlemen to convince the Widow of his merits as potential husband. In his comments to the Gentlemen, Hoard uses the language of the hunt to describe the capture of the Widow, saying both, "Follow hard, gentlemen, follow hard!" and "There, take her at the bound" (III.i.180, 185). As in Michaelmas Term, the language of the hunt is used to describe the stalking of prey within the sphere of the game. To Hoard, the Widow represents prey both as a weaker opponent and as a commodified female victim who exists solely as prize within a masculine and capitalistic power struggle. However, unlike Easy or the Country Wench in Michaelmas Term, the Courtesan assumes the role of weak opponent and commodity for an express purpose, but does not lose her agency in her use of this role. She plays the part of the reluctant widow, testing Hoard's love by saying, "Alas, you love not widows but for wealth. I promise you I ha' nothing, sir" (III.i.203-04). These words, ironically, are the first true words that the Courtesan has spoken to the old usurer and, with Hoard's answer to this remark, she allows him to believe that he has triumphed. A plan is then concocted to thwart Witgood by carrying her to Cole Harbour where a priest will be waiting. Through the manipulation of information, the Courtesan moves closer to a profitable marriage, while Witgood uses the information that she has been carried away by Hoard to enrage Lucre and enlist his promises of monetary aid on Witgood's behalf.

Witgood realizes that both Lucre and Hoard perceive all events through the lens of a single competitive relationship and is able to manipulate his uncle's emotions, motivations, and moves by appealing to this competitive dynamic. As Lucre comes upon Hoard's party at Cole Harbour and demands an audience with the Widow, Lucre remains unaware that the marriage has already taken place; Lucre is put at an immediate disadvantage in this encounter because he is not privy to a crucial piece of information. His entire conversation with the Widow, therefore, is predicated on the false assumption that Hoard's attempt to marry her can still be thwarted. Since Lucre believes that there remains a very appreciable possibility of defeating Hoard and advancing Witgood, he is willing to execute any move that appears necessary in order to secure victory over Hoard. Given her knowledge of this feud between the two old usurers, the Courtesan/Widow is able to provide the appropriate bait to secure the return of Witgood's mortgaged lands. When confronted with the Widow's knowledge of the earlier cozening, Lucre realizes that the only viable move in this encounter is to restore, or at least appear to restore, Witgood's property. Moreover, in order to transform Witgood into an even more attractive suitor, Lucre promises to "estate him / In farder blessings" by making Witgood his heir (IV.i.84-85). In exchange for these promises, Lucre asks the Widow, "In the mean season, / Will you protest, before these gentlemen, / To keep yourself as you are now at this present?" (IV.i.90-92). Since he has not had access to the report of the Widow's marriage to Hoard, within Lucre's perceptual framework her present state is constituted as both single and interested in Witgood. His earnest question, however, does not denote the same state to the Courtesan; consequently, she is able to answer truthfully and ironically that "I will be as clear then as I am now" (IV.i.94). Through the possession of information, both about her own marital status and

about the continual conflict between Lucre and Hoard, and the skillful manipulation of appearance and manner, the Courtesan is able to secure Lucre's promise to restore Witgood's fortune, while also making him an heir in the process.

Despite his outward show of familial devotion, Lucre never intends to restore Witgood's lands or to make Witgood heir to his fortune. Rather, the full scope of his actions is only to provide the *appearance* of Witgood's renewed fortunes. Such appearance is necessary to gain possession of the Widow Medler for Witgood, an event which will both defeat Hoard and assure an easy future mark in one fell swoop. Suspecting Lucre's trick, Witgood forces the old usurer to verbally agree to the complete restoration of the mortgaged lands:

> WITGOOD: Pray let me understand you rightly, uncle: you give it me but in trust?
>
> LUCRE: No.
>
> WITGOOD: That is, you trust me with it.
>
> LUCRE: True, true.
>
> WITGOOD [*Aside*]: But if ever I trust you with it again, would I might be truss'd up for my labour! (IV.ii.58-64).

In order to keep up the facade that he is actually returning the lands to Witgood, Lucre is forced to agree with Witgood's definition of "trust," thus conceding, in front of witnesses, that the lands are completely the possession of Witgood. Although Lucre loses the struggle for control of Witgood's land, in relinquishing control he perceives that a satisfying measure of defeat may also be visited upon his old enemy, Hoard. Lucre believes that he will have the last laugh on Hoard, but Witgood realizes that the trick has actually caught both of the old ones. As Witgood says of the two old men,

> He has no conscience, faith, would laugh at them.

> They laugh at one another!
> Who then can be so cruel? Troth, not I;
> I rather pity now than aught envy.
> I do conceive such joy in mine own happiness,
> I have no leisure yet to laugh at their follies (IV.ii.80-85).

Witgood and the Courtesan stand outside the competitive relationship of the two old foes, but are nonetheless able to benefit from knowledge of this perpetual contest. Witgood need not laugh at their follies because these follies have begot the restoration of his land and the profitable marriage of the Courtesan.

Despite these victories, Witgood is not completely satisfied with the substance of his winnings and decides, without the knowledge of the Courtesan, to gull Hoard of money that is owed to various creditors. To this end, Witgood creates a fictional precontract between himself and the Widow Medler and claims that Hoard has "wrought his undoing by the injurious detaining of his contract" (IV.iv.89). The aim of this stratagem relies on the Courtesan's skill in correctly reading the signifier, whose signification is reached not through direct denotative meaning, but rather through indirection based on a shared, yet exclusionary code. The Courtesan correctly interprets Witgood's misdirection and baits the hook on which Witgood hopes to catch Hoard:

> [Witgood] is now caught by his creditors; the slave's needy, his debts petty; he'll rather bind himself to all inconveniences than rot in prison; by this only means you may get a release from him. 'Tis not yet come to his uncle's hearing; send speedily for the creditors; by this time he's desperate, he'll set his hand to anything. Take order for his debts or discharge 'em quite. A pax on him, let's be rid of a rascal! (IV.iv.115-120).

Since Hoard is not privy to the same information as the Widow/Courtesan, he is unable to interpret Witgood's misdirection and therefore relies on his wife to translate its meaning, a translation which forms the bait for the final trick in Witgood's multi-layered trick.

When Witgood arrives, he and the Courtesan outwardly assume the appropriate roles of estranged and disdainful lovers. In private conference, however, the internal motivation for this act is explicitly revealed, as the Courtesan assures Witgood that if he signs a release from the fictional precontract, Hoard will pay all of Witgood's creditors. At this point, the Courtesan expresses her distaste for this particular scheme: "But methinks, i'faith, you might have made some shift to discharge this yourself, having in the mortgage, and never have burden'd my conscience with it" (IV.iv.161-163). Though she has transcended her initial role as Witgood's agent, the Courtesan is forced, in the final trick, to re-assume this role in order to protect her newly established position. She is not consulted about the new plot, but is instead presented with Witgood's misdirective communique to which she must quickly adapt or relinquish her previous victory in the gamesphere of marriage. As a master player of the urban gameworld, Witgood uses his knowledge of the Courtesan's precarious position to enforce her compliance with his final plot, a plot wherein he uses a shared yet exclusive system of signification to convey his actual knowledge.

Having relinquished his fictional claim to the Widow/Courtesan, Witgood executes the necessary verbal move to placate his despondent uncle, saying, "Will you have the truth on't? He is married to a whore, i'faith" (V.i.9). By playing upon Lucre's desire to score a hit against Hoard, Witgood diverts attention from the unfulfilled outcome of his prospective marriage and refocuses that attention on the actuality of Hoard's situation. Thus Lucre's perceptual

reality is realigned so that he may once again insert himself at the apex of his consuming adversarial relationship with Hoard. Presented with this new information, Lucre gleefully agrees to attend the wedding celebration of his unsuspecting rival and, unbeknownst to either himself or Hoard, of his nephew and Hoard's niece, Joyce. During the festivities the Courtesan is recognized by Onesiphorous, Limber, and Kix, transforming Hoard's triumph into ignominious defeat. Hoard has not only married a "Dutch" widow, but, more importantly, he has failed to pierce her disguise or discern the external reality of her situation, thus showing his inadequacy as player at the highest levels of competition within the urban gameworld. As the Courtesan says to him, "If error were committed, 'twas by you; / Thank your own folly" (V.ii.122-23). Like Richard Follywit, Hoard is ultimately defeated because he fails to account for the actions, skill, and even the presence of other players in the urban arena. Preoccupation, be it with lover or enemy, dulls the senses and topples the mighty.

The final move by Witgood and the Courtesan in the elaborate plot of A Trick to Catch the Old One is a successful attempt to reconcile themselves with the two old usurers and advantageously insert themselves into the social structure of urban London. As George E. Rowe Jr. writes, "forgiving is essentially a matter of releasing someone from former debts, and one aspect of Witgood's success is his ability to trick both Lucre and Hoard into performing symbolic acts of forgiveness which are abhorrent to their natures" (81). In order to achieve this reconciled position, the Courtesan must attack Hoard at the level of social standing and appearance. She says to her husband, "Despise me, publish me, I am your wife; / What shame can I have now but you'll have part?" (V.ii.112-13). Hoard, realizing the verity of these words, replies, "I must embrace shame to be rid of shame. / Conceal'd disgrace prevents a public

name" (V.ii.135-36). Having obtained this reluctant admission of fealty from Hoard, the Courtesan then attempts to inscribe herself more fully within the urban social structure by assuming the role of prodigal daughter and renouncing her former life. Witgood, the self-fictionalized prodigal son, follows suit, assuming a subservient position of kneeling, while disclaiming the "cause of youth's undoing" (V.ii.169). At the conclusion of each of their speeches, both Witgood and the Courtesan announce themselves as "reclaim'd," and thus reinscribed, in newly wrought positions of privilege, within the received social structure of urban London. Through their skill as urban gamesters, the two conspirators momentarily disrupt social order only to reestablish its power after they have inscribed themselves within its structure. Such restabilization of the power structure, though in a slightly amended form, allows Witgood and the Courtesan to escape the fates of Richard Follywit in A Mad World, My Masters or Quomodo in Michaelmas Term, both of whom fail to transcend their roles as players and consolidate their newly won positions. As Hoard ironically says at the end of the play, those who "seem most crafty prove oft-times most fools" (V.ii.184). In the world of A Trick to Catch the Old One, a corollary to this statement seems to be that those who seem most foolish oft-times prove most crafty, as both Witgood and the Courtesan display in their desire to show themselves as overly humble and repentant. They have caught the old ones and in the process have proven themselves masters in the urban gameworld without arousing undue attention. Properly concealed within the urban social structure, the two are uniquely positioned to consolidate and further their gains.

Unlike Lucre and Hoard, whose perceptual realities have been distorted by a competitive tunnel-vision, Witgood and the Courtesan succeed in the urban arena through their ability to utilize the informational trump cards that they possess. Prior defeat has armed them with myriad strategies within the London

gameworld and simultaneously armoured them against the complacencies of Follywit in A Mad World, My Masters and the singular blindness of Lucre and Hoard. Strategic information is thus parlayed into easy victory for the two conspirators as they shift appearance and morality through a multitude of situational variables. Witgood and the Courtesan represent the new elite players who supplant the aged veterans, or old ones, within the London arena, inscribing themselves into positions of power before reasserting the primacy of the hierarchical structure. Thus concealed, the two are strategically positioned for the next informational trump card to be dealt to them. Middleton fuses ideas from A Mad World, My Masters and Michaelmas Term in order to create the comic world of A Trick to Catch the Old One, in which the shifting game requires a constant influx of players who process information quickly and critically and use this knowledge to formulate innovative responses to varying situations.

Chapter 5 - A Chaste Maid in Cheapside

First performed between 1611 and 1613, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside represents a synthesis of Middleton's earlier city comedies, A Mad World, My Masters, Michaelmas Term, and A Trick to Catch the Old One, which encapsulates Middleton's final, and most self-conscious, comedic statement on the ludic nature of the competitive and capitalistic urban world. The constant de-valuation of human life within the earlier plays' fluid plurality of values is enhanced metaphorically through the setting of A Chaste Maid in Cheapside. Known for its me(a/e)t market, Cheapside represents, in the words of Bryan Loughrey and Neil Taylor, "the reduction of the human to mere flesh," both in its persistent imagery of carnality and in its commodification of the human body through prostitution (xviii). By emphasizing an aggregate equation of copulation, material gain, and the commodification of women in capitalistic, masculine struggles for power, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside establishes a closer connection between the sexual and fiscal spheres than do any of the earlier plays. As Leggatt writes of the play, "sex has been detached from love; here, it is simply a marketable commodity" (139). Sexual and monetary spheres intermingle, causing enhanced interconnections between the various gamespheres. In the tight comic structure of A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, the result of each individual encounter within the play's four parallel plots, or games, affects the outcome of subsequent contests within one or more of the other scenarios. Players are much more dependent on the actions of other players within the urban gameworld, greatly curtailing the degree of agency afforded to each player. In the words of Leggatt, "The characters exude vitality and self-confidence; but they are never so much masters of their situations as they think they are" (139-40). No master players exist in this version of the London gameworld, and this key feature further emphasizes the liminality and

democratization of the space that is created in the deconstruction of the binary opposition of class. Appearance, access to information, and perception remain as the controlling imperatives within the urban ecosystem, but no player has yet adapted sufficiently to the exigencies of this new environment to dominate the predatory landscape. Further, this new world of interaction and exchange is necessarily obsessed with language and the arbitrary nature of communication. Within this predatory milieu, familial relations are again subordinated to the dictates of specific game situations; family members become allies only in cases of mutual benefit. Thus, as a fitting finale to Middleton's examination of the ludic and predatory nature of his city, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside chronicles the genesis of a mature version of the urban gameworld.

As Middleton's comic masterpiece and final synthesis of the ludic possibilities of the urban setting, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside relies on a tight structure in order to emphasize a mature comic vision of interdependence between individual games within the urban gameworld. As Richard Levin observed in The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama, the play is comprised of four parallel plots, each of which involves a triangle between two men and one woman. However, the "elaborate network of correspondences," as Covatta terms the play, appears neither contrived nor artificial. Rather, the symbiotic relationships between various segments of the gameworld are a necessary condition of the democratic liminality which replaces the class structure before the emergence of master players within the new paradigm. No player is yet sufficiently adept at the urban gameworld's rules of skill to dictate either an encounter's outcome or its reverberations throughout the urban milieu. Instead, the players in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside are like novice chess players who do not plan a number of moves in advance, but assess each situation as it is presented and respond with an appropriate countermove.

Unlike Witgood in A Trick to Catch the Old One, Quomodo in Michaelmas Term, or even Follywit in A Mad World, My Masters, players in this version of the London gameworld do not possess the requisite experience, skill, or information needed to orchestrate the elaborate plans necessary as a precondition to capturing prizes of sufficient value that will ensure their lasting comfort. Players in this version of London do not plan for contingencies, but rather respond to contingencies as they arise. Consequently, these players do not strive for major consolidations of gain, but instead struggle for, at best, small increments of gain or, at worst, a stasis of position. In Middleton's mature conception of the urban gameworld, the interdependence of the various gamespheres portrays a situation that is simultaneously democratic in its insistence that each player has an equal opportunity within the confines of the city, and bleakly realistic in its insistence that there are also no windfall profits awaiting the prospective urban player.

Within this mature conception of the urban world, players exist in an equilibrium of opportunity in which consolidation of one's position is a major achievement. These features combine to create a system in which the binary opposition of victor/vanquished appears as little more than shades of grey along a spectrum of success. A potential player must ascertain whether or not participation in the game will provide adequate return on his or her investment of time and effort. Such a decision is necessary because in this mature version of the urban gameworld it is possible, through conscious decision, to decline to occupy the role of participant. Allwit clearly recognizes the nature of the urban game in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside and opts to decline the role of player for the more lucrative role of game facilitator. In other words, within his particular gamesphere, Allwit occupies the position of the 'house,' profiting by facilitating, rather than by playing the game. He stands outside the usual compass of the

sexual and monetary gamespheres, entering the urban game only as agent to facilitate the continued existence of his established position. Acutely aware of his position, Allwit pays solitary tribute to Sir Walter Whorehound, lone player in Allwit's sexual gaming house:

> I thank him, h'as maintain'd my house this ten years,
> Not only keeps my wife, but a keeps me
> And all my family; I am at his table,
> He gets me all my children, and pays the nurse,
> Monthly, or weekly, puts me to nothing,
> Rent, nor church duties, not so much as the scavenger:
> The happiest state that ever man was born to (I.ii.15-21).

Allwit recognizes the tangible monetary benefit that he receives as remuneration for his role as facilitator in the sexual game played by Whorehound. In this relationship, Mistress Allwit occupies the position of commodity, provided by Allwit and consumed by Whorehound. Just as the casino provides 'free' alcoholic refreshments for gamblers during their period of play, Allwit also provides Whorehound with 'free' sexual refreshments in the person of Mistress Allwit for the duration of Whorehound's usurpation of husbandly privilege and power. Neither type of refreshment is truly free, however, but costs the player in monetary terms through the impairment of his or her judgement. Thus, it is not Allwit, but Whorehound who is "Eaten with jealousy to the inmost bone" with regard to Mistress Allwit (I.ii.45). In his role as facilitator, Allwit is free from the encumbering effects of such emotions because Whorehound has "both the cost and the torment" (I.ii.54). Whorehound's judgement, on the other hand, is severely impaired as a result of overindulgence in the free 'refreshments' in Allwit's gaming house.

In facilitating Whorehound's sexual liaisons, Allwit realizes that he must assume a specific role. Although he is not a player in the sexual gamesphere, Allwit must properly discern Whorehound's expectations in order to facilitate the appropriate semblance of game order within the knight's perceptual reality. As Allwit so aptly states, "'tis but observing a man's humour once, and he may ha' him by the nose all his life" (I.ii.83-85). In fact, the stability of Allwit's position is dependent upon the continuance of Whorehound's interest in Allwit's game. Allwit confirms the ludic aspect of this relationship at the entrance of Whorehound into the sexual gaming house. As Whorehound dons his slippers and attempts to convince Allwit to withdraw, Allwit says in an aside, "The game begins already" (I.ii.80). With this statement begins the verbal banter which forms an integral component of the ludic triangle and through which Allwit is able to convert words to coins. The two men reverse roles, with Allwit assuming the role of disinterested outsider in his own home, while Whorehound relaxes in the role proper to the husband. Whorehound accuses Allwit of sleeping with his own wife, and Allwit denies it. Whorehound threatens to marry, and Allwit begs him to reconsider. Even though Allwit asserts in an aside that he has "poisoned / [Whorehound's] hopes in marriage already," he continues to assume the appearance of the subordinate position because in order to ensure the continued existence of his actual position of advantage, he must provide a game experience that is pleasurable to Whorehound. In other words, Whorehound must be manipulated into believing that he is winning a game that exists only to extract monetary consideration from him. Allwit uses his skill as an urban gameplayer to maneuver himself into the non-playing role of facilitator. In doing so, Allwit places himself in a position which lies outside the binary opposition of competition, and allows him to reap the rewards of the game without assuming the attendant risks.

In the complex urban gameworld of A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, however, the relationship between Whorehound and the Allwits does not exist in a vacuum, but is inextricably tied to events which occur in the other three plots, or games. Players (and facilitators) must therefore be aware of other gamespheres and the possible reverberations of the outcomes in those spheres. This necessity is especially true in regard to Whorehound since he is directly involved in three of the plots and directly affected by the fourth. While he keeps Mistress Allwit, Whorehound is simultaneously attempting to marry Moll Yellowhammer in order to obtain her considerable dowry. The Yellowhammers, on the other hand, attempt to wed Moll to Whorehound in order to obtain the status of class title; in a capitalistic transaction, monetary consideration is exchanged for social status through the commercial medium of Moll. She is regarded by both her husband and her parents as little more than a possession, a commodity of exchange and useful intermediary between commercial and class structures. The exchange is complicated, however, by the presence of Touchwood Junior, who also wants possession of Moll. Although it is clear that Touchwood Junior represents Moll's choice in the play, it is also clear that Touchwood Junior sees Moll as a prize in the game of sexual conquest. Seeing that Whorehound has arrived on the scene, he says in an aside,

> I must hasten it;
> Or else pick a famine; her blood's mine,
> And that's the surest. Well, knight, that choice spoil
> Is only kept for me (I.i.133-36).

Through the metonymic substitution of "blood" for sexuality, Touchwood Junior both emphasizes the intimate aspect of attaining Moll (perhaps hinting that they have already engaged in sexual relations) and begins the allusion to hunting

that he continues in the final lines of this speech. To Touchwood Junior, Moll is "that choice spoil," an assignation that connotes the realms of both hunting and gaming. Clearly, Moll is not afforded the level of player in the urban gameworld, but instead occupies the positions of commercial commodity, medium of exchange, and sexual goal.

In addition to his efforts to marry Moll Yellowhammer, Whorehound is also involved in the prospective match between his whore, the Welsh Gentlewoman, and Tim Yellowhammer, who has been away at Cambridge for his education. Like the Country Wench in Michaelmas Term, the Welsh Gentlewoman is brought to the city by her former lover in order to increase her value as a commodity, since the anonymous urban environment permits, and even encourages, the creation of new identities. As Whorehound says to his former whore, "I bring thee up to turn thee into gold, wench, and make thy fortune shine like your bright trade; a goldsmith's shop sets out a City maid. . . . Here you must pass for a pure virgin" (I.i.91-93,96). The equation between flesh and cash is clear in Whorehound's attempt to counterfeit a virgin, a marketable city commodity. From this advantageous position, the strategic possibilities for the Welsh Gentlewoman are numerous in either the consolidation or the promotion of her position. Unlike Frank Gullman in A Mad World, My Masters or the Courtesan in A Trick to Catch the Old One, however, the Welsh Gentlewoman does not possess the requisite skill and experience to become a skilled female player in the urban game. A cultural outsider, she is not able to use her appearance and status as commodified prize within the sexual gamesphere to her advantage. With little more than a fictitious "nineteen mountains" in her possession, she is consigned to marry the foolish Tim, who believes that he can "prove a whore to be an honest woman" (IV.i.38). In fact, in her very desire to marry Tim, an urban incompetent who is sure to be gulled of

his father's riches, the Welsh Gentlewoman squanders the opportunity which has been presented to her and thus displays her inexperience and lack of skill in the urban gameworld. In the world of A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, however, such a marriage represents a realist compromise for both Tim and the Welsh Gentlewoman that circumvents the possibility of utter defeat which loomed over all players in Middleton's earlier plays.

Through the dual plots involving the Yellowhammer children, it is clear that the concern of the parents lies in advancing their own status through the medium of their progeny. In Tim's case, as in the case of Sim Quomodo in Michaelmas Term, education is used by the parents as a means of transcending class limitations. Since higher education amongst the mercantile class was still uncommon in the Jacobean period, attendance at an established university would confer a level of status that was previously reserved for the gentry. This new prestige would in turn transform the status of the parents, since the accomplishments of the children would, in theory, reflect the merits of their parents. As one's only permanent legacy, advancement in the position of one's child would also ensure the continuance of one's status position after death. Unfortunately for the Yellowhammers, the education that Tim receives in Cambridge is of little value in preparing him for the situational reality of the urban gameworld. Instead, Tim learns a language in Cambridge that is so foreign that it is incomprehensible to the inhabitants of London. The introduction of this discourse into the urban world does not facilitate ludic or commercial interaction, but impedes it because of the impossibility of translation. Tim's learned words can be made neither flesh nor cash. Rather than an advantage, Tim's education becomes a liability within the confines of the urban gameworld. Through the course of the play, the Yellowhammers come to realize their error in attempting to transcend the limitations of class

through a process of education that provides no basis of knowledge for life in the urban world.

Difficulty in communication between mercantile and scholarly systems of discourse begins early in the play. The porter arrives with a Latin message from Tim which simply means "To my father and mother, both my most loving parents" (Loughrey and Taylor 165). However, Maudline, who does not read Latin, translates the message into the material and commercial discourse of the urban world. She says,

> Pray let me see it, I was wont to understand him.
> '*Amatissimis carissimis*', he has sent the carrier's man, he says; '*ambobus parentibus*', for a pair of boots; '*patri et matri*', pay the porter, or it makes no matter (I.i.58-61).

For Maudline, who is immersed in the commercial discourse of the urban gameworld, the message can only make sense in terms of a transaction. Thus, within her perceptual reality, money must be exchanged for services rendered. The Porter, seizing the opportunity, re-translates the missive so that services rendered only includes the initial delivery of the letter. The Porter is able to take advantage of the situation because he has knowledge of both mercantile and scholarly discourse, and can use others' problem of translation to his advantage. According to Rowe, "The confusion simultaneously reveals the potential ambiguity of language and the ability of individuals to force their unique meanings on words, thereby transforming reality by transforming the language used to describe that reality" (133). Rowe goes on to argue that this confusion reflects the lack of significance of the play itself (134). However, I would argue that Sims the Porter, with his name that evokes Sim Quomodo of Michaelmas Term, represents a possible extension of the scholar with experience in the urban gameworld. Tim, however, does not show any signs of

such urban skill in the play. Contrary to Maudline's statement that "he was an idiot indeed / When he went out of London, but now he's well mended," Tim remains an urban incompetent through concentration on a discourse that has no place in the urban milieu (III.ii.159-60). To the end, Tim is unwavering in his belief in the existence of the Welsh Gentlewoman's riches: "Where be these mountains? I was promis'd mountains, / But there's such a mist, I can see none of 'em" (V.iv.98-99). Despite this foolish belief, Tim does acknowledge the importance of the sexual realm to the urban world, albeit in the scholarly discourse of Latin, when he says, "*Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*, mother" ('Since I cannot move the powers above, I shall work on the lower regions') (V.iv.103, Loughrey and Taylor 237). Tim, however, remains a disappointment of his parents. The Yellowhammers discover that while children may provide a means of either extending or consolidating one's victories within the urban gameworld, they may also be a liability and a cost.

The economic factor of children is also stressed in the subplot involving Touchwood Senior, Sir Oliver Kix, and Lady Kix. As Touchwood Senior explains, he and his wife do not have the necessary resources to raise their ever-increasing brood:

> But, as thou say'st, we must give way to need,
> And live awhile asunder; our desires
> Are both too fruitful for our barren fortunes.
> How adverse runs the destiny of some creatures:
> Some only can get riches and no children;
> We only can get children and no riches (II.i.7-12).

While some couples "get riches and no children," for the Touchwoods, production in the monetary sphere does not keep up with production in the procreative sphere. They must therefore separate until a solvent equilibrium

can be established between the two spheres. As Touchwood Senior says, in an appropriately ludic metaphor, "There I give o'er the set, throw down the cards / I dare not take them up" (II.i.41-42). He perceives that he must absent himself from the sexual gamesphere in order to re-establish his viability in the monetary gamesphere. At first appearance Touchwood Senior's incredible potency "in that game" forms a significant barrier to the realization of his goal, since he produces children not only within the confines of marriage, but also outside the bounds of wedlock (II.i.54). Almost immediately upon the exit of his wife, a Wench enters the scene with a baby in her arms and claims that Touchwood Senior is the father. His response is to shift the exchange from the realm of sexuality into the realm of the monetary by addressing both mother and child in commodified terms: "such mutton" and "this half yard of flesh" (II.i.80,82). In doing so, Touchwood Senior reinforces the inter-relationship of the two gamespheres, blurring the distinction and collapsing the boundary between the two. He encourages the Wench to solve her problem of unwanted offspring within the confines of the urban game, advising her that "There's tricks enough to rid thy hand on't . . . twenty devices" and giving her money as retroactive payment for sexual services rendered (II.i.94, 96). Since pregnancy is not a new occurrence for her, the Wench agrees to the terms, later tricking the Promoters into believing that the child is, appropriately, meat. As Covatta points out, "situational exigency dictates the nature of proper conduct" (150). In the conflation of the monetary and sexual spheres, the child remains a commodity, a tangible symbol of the equation of sex to money. Fortunately for Touchwood Senior, however, this equation is not always, though usually, solved in terms of cost. Through his relationship with the Kixes, Touchwood Senior is able to transform his propensity for impregnation from a monetary liability into a monetary asset.

While Touchwood Senior and his wife suffer from over-production in the sexual sphere and under-production in the monetary sphere, the Kixes are subject to the opposite fate, which entails an abundance of money and a lack of offspring. As Lady Kix says, they are rich "All but in blessings, / And there the beggar goes beyond us. O! O! O! / To be seven years a wife and not a child! O not a child!" (II.i.135-37). In reply to this lament, Kix underscores the connection between sexual and monetary affairs, saying, "I'd give a thousand pound to purchase fruitfulness" (II.i.145). Since it seems that he cannot achieve fertility, Kix avers that he will exchange some of his gains from the monetary sphere for that desired outcome. Touchwood Senior fortuitously overhears this conversation, giving him crucial information in his campaign for the re-establishment of monetary viability; the Kixes' situation presents him with an opportunity to transform his sexual potency from a financial liability into a financial asset. However, after Touchwood Senior's departure from the stage, it becomes clear that simple desire for progeny is not the only motivation for Sir Oliver and Lady Kix. She remonstrates,

> 'Tis our dry barrenness puffs up Sir Walter;
> None gets by your not-getting, but that knight;
> He's made by th' means, and fats his fortunes shortly
> In a great dowry with a goldsmith's daughter (II.i.160-63).

The bond between the sexual and monetary gamespheres is further accentuated in this revelation, which also demonstrates the interconnectedness of the various urban games in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside. The Kixes' concern for offspring through sexual union masks a desire for further advancement within the monetary gamesphere: begetting children begets wealth. Kix thus offers Touchwood Senior the sum of four hundred pounds to administer a 'physic' that will impregnate his wife. In order to ensure

fertilization, Touchwood Senior administers her 'physic' in the prone position, thus completing his end of the contractual agreement. In this equation, money exchanged for fertility entails an investment which will in turn create more money. Thus, through the medium of children, money actually begets money. The word, which forms the contract between the Kixes and Touchwood Senior, is made flesh and the flesh is made money.

As has been demonstrated throughout Middleton's comic plays, social competition, in both the monetary and sexual spheres, is enacted through the capitalistic discourse(s) of the urban market. Consequently, players transform words, both deceitful and contractual, into either material or sexual possessions. Since differentiation between sexual and monetary realms is very difficult in Middleton's deconstructive urban world, these possessions are, in effect, interchangeable commodities in the world of the play. Nowhere is this connection between capitalistic discourse and the intertwined gamespheres of the urban world more evident than in the scene involving the Wench and the two Promoters. True to the spirit of the urban player, the Wench proclaims her ludic intentions upon entry into the scene: "Women had need of wit, if they'll shift here, / And she that hath wit may shift anywhere" (II.ii.139-40). Aware of the urban game and adept at its rules of skill, the Wench plays upon the perceptual expectations of the two Promoters in the conception and execution of her scheme. She intentionally allows one commodity, a loin of mutton, to show in her basket, while concealing the commodity of which she wishes to dispose, her baby, realizing that the exposed flesh will act as a lure to attract the Promoters into her lexical trap. Through the use of language that is both contractual and deceitful, she procures a sworn oath from the two men to keep the basket until she returns. Words are thus transmuted from abstract signifiers into concrete obligation; the word is not only made flesh, but responsibility for that flesh, the

importance of which is manifest in the reaction of the Promoters upon discovery of the child. In a clear parody of contractual agreements, both men agree that their oath, regardless of the manner in which it was obtained, constitutes a contractual obligation to both mother and child. The Promoters are defeated in this particular encounter and therefore must, according to the code of the game, accept the consequences of that defeat (at least until they are able to dispose of the child in another urban encounter). Through the market discourse of social competition, the Wench uses words to negate an urban liability. Within Middleton's conception of the urban gameworld in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, such negation of liability and impetus towards static position is all for which most players can hope or achieve.

Democratic in its absence of elite players and realistic in its insistence on the modesty of urban gain, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside demonstrates the interdependency of players in various gamespheres, thereby representing a final synthesis of Middleton's earlier conceptions of the urban gameworld. In order to survive, each player must be cognizant of the events and outcomes in other spheres and, in cases which have bearing on his or her own gamesphere(s), take steps to affect those results. Such necessity is especially clear in the case of Allwit. Content in his position as facilitator, Allwit stands by and passively observes the massive consumption of food and drink at his 'daughter's' christening, thinking, "Had this been all my cost now I had been beggar'd" (III.ii.64-65). However, at news from Davy Dahumma that Whorehound is about to marry, Allwit moves quickly to intervene. Marriage represents a threat both to Whorehound's continued patronage of Allwit's sexual gaming house and to Allwit's privileged position as facilitator who remains outside the game, yet profits from its existence. By imparting the news of Whorehound's imminent marriage, Davy utilizes his knowledge of Allwit's

perceptual reality, manipulating Allwit's actions for his own purposes. He says, "I knew t'would prick. Thus do I fashion still / All mine own ends by him and his rank toil" (III.ii.225-26). As potential heir to Whorehound, Davy has a direct interest in both the game involving Whorehound and Touchwood Junior, and the game involving Kix and Touchwood Senior. In order to affect the outcome of the former contest and achieve his "own ends," Davy, through his knowledge of Whorehound's movements, enlists the aid of an agent, Allwit. Unfortunately for Davy, he does not realize that intervention is also necessary in the latter contest, believing instead that the actions of his agent will re-assert the desired status quo. Since he does not have access to all of the pertinent information, Davy's actions are doomed to failure.

Since Whorehound's marriage represents a very real threat to the facilitator's gamesphere and position, Allwit is forced to intervene in Whorehound's affairs by approaching Yellowhammer. By entering this gamesphere, Allwit momentarily abandons the role of urban facilitator for the role of urban player. Through disguise, he assumes a new identity for his encounter with Yellowhammer, in which he attempts to utilize his knowledge of Yellowhammer's perceptual reality in order to sabotage Whorehound's marriage contract. To this end, Allwit executes a series of moves designed to play upon Yellowhammer's perceived sense of morality and, therefore, evoke particular responses in him. In assuming the Yellowhammer name, Allwit attempts to establish himself as a surrogate conscience within Yellowhammer's perceptual reality. Allwit ironically informs Yellowhammer that Whorehound is "an arrant whoremaster, consumes his time and state,-- / --whom in my knowledge he hath kept this seven years; / Nay, cuz, another man's wife too (IV.i.227-29). When Yellowhammer replies, "I'll mark him for a knave and villain for't," Allwit believes that he has secured both victory in this encounter and the

position of his own gamesphere. Unfortunately for Allwit, however, he has been long absent from the game as active player and therefore makes a crucial error in his judgement of Yellowhammer's morality by not allowing for the possibility/probability of moral relativism.

After Allwit departs, Yellowhammer says,

> Well grant all this, say now his deeds are black,
> Pray what serves marriage, but to call him back;
> I have kept a whore myself, and had a bastard . . .
> The knight is rich, he shall be my son-in-law (IV.i.265-67,272).

The lure of Whorehound's perceived wealth and social position overrides any external concern for propriety within Yellowhammer's perceptual reality. The actualities of the urban gameworld dictate that Yellowhammer subordinate all other concerns to the economic imperative, a dictum of which Allwit must be aware as a player (though not necessarily as a facilitator). Yellowhammer justifies the manner in which Whorehound breaks the macro-level rules of societal morality through a personal fluidity of values. Within this framework, transgression of the dominant social order is transformed into youthful excess, in which Yellowhammer himself admits to having indulged. Although Whorehound violates a macro-level rule, this move is deemed legal and acceptable within the micro-level game involving Yellowhammer because Yellowhammer perceives the benefits that will accrue from the maintenance of his position. As Covatta writes, "Characters step outside the boundaries on propriety and morality but do so because the real advantages outweigh the hypothetical benefits of maintaining sterile order" (158-59). Allwit, who has forsaken active participation in the urban gameworld, overlooks the situational exigencies that face Yellowhammer and denies the possibility of moral fluidity on the part of the inner-city goldsmith. In looking out for his own interests, Allwit

fails to recognize this quality of competing self-interest in the person of another player. Unknown to Allwit, however, there is yet another player who is involved in this gamesphere and whose self-interest coincides with his own: Touchwood Junior, the romantic interest in Moll's young and manipulated life.

As in A Mad World, My Masters, Michaelmas Term, and A Trick to Catch the Old One, the ludic competition for control of the female body is enacted within a capitalistic and masculine framework. In this case, while Moll represents both goal and prize for her two potential husbands, she is also a commodity in a commercial transaction between her father and Whorehound. Moll is thus stripped of her humanity and relegated to the position of chattel in the exchange of a business transaction, "baggage" which Yellowhammer swears he will lock up "As carefully as [his] gold" (III.i.42,43). Her commodified position is forcibly illustrated in the scene involving her second abortive attempt to elope. Caught by her mother, a feminine extension of the patriarchal order of the father, Moll is dragged across the stage by the hair like a disobedient animal. It is clear that in this action there exists no loving, familial bond, but rather that Moll, as daughter, represents a valuable possession to be guarded, and later exchanged for a perceived increase in social position, handed literally from father to husband in the marriage ceremony. Stressing both the condition of ownership and the value of the possession, Maudline proclaims to her husband, "I have brought your jewel by the hair" (IV.iii.31). Yellowhammer realizes that her value is lost if she succeeds in her attempts to escape, making it imperative that he complete the transaction in the most expeditious manner possible. He says, "we'll lose no time now, nor trust to't any longer: tomorrow morn as early as sunrise we'll have you join'd" (IV.iii.43-45). In this union the contract will be fulfilled, bestowing, through the medium of Moll, social respectability upon Yellowhammer and material wealth upon Whorehound.

Though she remains at the centre of the relationship between Whorehound and her father, Moll occupies that position as a static point of exchange. Within Middleton's conceptions of the urban gameworld, Moll represents the epitome of the commodified female, existing without voice and without agency.

Desire for ownership and control of the female body represents the point of common interest in each of the men in Moll's life. This commodified position as medium of exchange is augmented by her role as goal and prize in the competition between Whorehound and Touchwood Junior. As in the battle between Penitent Brothel and Master Harebrain for possession of Mistress Harebrain in A Mad World, My Masters, the contest between Whorehound and Touchwood Junior represents a masculine and capitalistic struggle for possession and ownership of the female body. Despite the emphasis on capitalistic and contractual struggle in the play, the conflict becomes increasingly governed by the masculine province of force. In a scene which is notable for its exhibition of the only real violence in Middleton's urban gameworlds, the two men draw their phallic rapiers and assert their rights to masculine possession of the commodified female. Violence appears in the final conception of the urban gameworld both as an attempt to display the realistic range of possible responses and an attempt to demonstrate the inextricability of the masculine and the capitalistic in the struggle for the control of the female body. It is striking that as the two men duel, their conversation is expressed exclusively in terms of game metaphors:

> SIR WALTER: Sir, I believe 'twill hold your life in play.
>
> TOUCHWOOD JUNIOR: Sir, you'll gain the heart in my breast at first!
>
> SIR WALTER: There is no dealing then? Think on the dowry for two thousand pounds.
>
> TOUCHWOOD JUNIOR: O now 'tis quit, sir.

SIR WALTER: And being of even hand, I'll play no longer (IV.iii.70-75).

The inclusion of these references to gaming emphasizes the ludic aspect of both the duel and the larger contest which that duel represents. In addition, Whorehound proposes a contractual settlement of their conflict, re-establishing the connection between masculine and capitalistic desire. The fight ends with the wounding of Whorehound, an event which robs Whorehound of his advantage and causes him to contemplate his own mor(t)ality. In the struggle for control of Moll, it is only fear of divine retribution that causes Whorehound to yield and admit defeat.

Whorehound, like Penitent Brothel in A Mad World, My Masters, repents of his past actions, thereby acquiescing to the dominant Christian value system and removing himself from the material concerns of the urban world. As in the case of Brothel, it is not sudden concern for societal morality which causes this change, but fear of consequences in the afterlife. Whorehound continues his inadvertent emulation of Brothel in the transference of blame from himself to an external party. Unlike Brothel, however, Whorehound has more than one site for the displacement of blame. Incredibly, he chastises Allwit for failing to provide moral guidance:

> Thou know'st me to be wicked, for thy baseness
> Kept the eyes open still on all my sins;
> None knew the dear account my soul stood charg'd with
> So well as thou, yet like hell's flattering angel
> Would'st never tell me on't (V.i.26-30).

Whorehound asserts that the sin lies not in the action itself, but in the negligence of the person who knew but failed to stop that action; lack of action is transmuted into the act of temptation. Thus, in true Middletonian irony, blame is displaced from the cuckolder to the cuckolded. The scope of Whorehound's

condemnation does not end here, but, like Brothel's, encompasses and targets the "Unconscionable woman," who is constructed as a corrupt seductress within Whorehound's perceptual reality (V.i.41). He says to Mistress Allwit, "There's nothing but thy appetite in that sorrow, / Thou weep'st for lust . . . I was well till thou begin'st to undo me" (V.i.60-61,63). Again, Middletonian irony emphasizes the hypocritical scope of Whorehound's project of reclamation, since women lack agency within the urban world, and it is women, rather than men, who are undone by the commodified consequences of sexual union. In facing his own mortality, Whorehound embraces the dominant Christian ideology, while simultaneously attempting to rid himself, through transference of agency, of any blame within his own perceptual reality.

During this conversation between Whorehound and the Allwits, a messenger arrives to inform the knight that Lady Kix is "new quick'ned" (V.i.142). The servant's choice of words is appropriate since quickening refers not only to the act of impregnation, but also to the alchemical process of transmuting base metal into gold. Through Touchwood Senior's contracted intervention, Lady Kix has literally created both a child and the gold that accompanies the birth of that child; word is made flesh is made gold. Upon hearing this news, Allwit realizes that the economic viability of his sole customer has been severely compromised. Consequently, he completely and unsentimentally reverses his previous stance with regard to Whorehound:

> I must tell you, sir,
> You have been somewhat bolder in my house
> Than I could well like of; I suff'red you
> Till it stuck here at my heart; I tell you truly
> I thought you had been familiar with my wife once (V.i.151-55).

Like players in the previous incarnations of the urban gameworld, Allwit operates within a fluid moral structure, a situational ethic which adapts itself to the exigencies of the moment. He is perfectly willing to assume the role of cuckold and sexual game facilitator as long as this role is a lucrative proposition. However, news of Whorehound's loss of fortune compells Allwit to end their relationship immediately and move on to other, more profitable, endeavours. Whorehound, the lone player in Allwit's sexual gaming house, also recognizes the ludic quality of their relationship, saying, "Gamesters, farewell, I have nothing left to play" (V.i.158). The Allwits, on the other hand, recognize the rewarding link between the sexual and the monetary, and hint that they will resume sexual gaming operations in the Strand. As Allwit realizes, "'There's no gamester like a politic sinner, / For who e'er games, the box is sure a winner'" (V.i.179-80). No matter who plays, the odds favour the 'house,' ensuring continued profit and the continued existence of gaming establishments. While Whorehound is living proof that gaming involves risk, Allwit is testament to the fact that the facilitation of gaming involves nothing but profit.

Fittingly, all of the players in the urban gameworld of A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, with one notable exception, are brought together in the final scene of the play. Due to the brush with his own mortality, Whorehound has absented himself from the urban gameworld and, through fear, embraced the dominant Christian ideology. The others, however, are present as the comic inertia of the play converts funeral into marriage, thus allowing each player to reassess his or her position within the reordered urban milieu. The marriage between Moll and Touchwood Junior is not contested by Yellowhammer because Whorehound has "prov'd villain" and so, little is to be gained by further opposition (V.iv.65). As Rowe puts it, "For all the bustling activity in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, the

world the drama depicts remains essentially unchanged" (145). Players compete within the confines of the urban gameworld, but their victories accomplish only small gradations of change. For many players in this world, simply holding an established position represents a major accomplishment. In explaining his position at the end of the play, Yellowhammer sums up the prevalent attitude toward competition within Middleton's mature urban world: "So fortune seldom deals two marriages / With one hand, and both lucky; the best is, / One feast will serve them both!" (V.iv.121-23). Despite the events of the play, Yellowhammer derives consolation from the fact that one feast will suffice for the weddings of both his children; like every other player in the game, he must make do with the cards he is dealt.

Of A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, Rowe writes, "The play does not provide a method of ordering our imperfect world, nor does it represent a hypothetical ideal worthy of contemplation. In a sense, the significance of this game is that it doesn't have any significance at all" (148). I would argue, however, that the significance of the play lies in the fact that it does not represent an ideal, but rather that it represents a mature conception of Middleton's ludic reality, a synthesis of Middleton's ideas about the urban gameworld. In this play it is possible to view all of the elements of the urban game portrayed in A Mad World, My Masters, Michaelmas Term, and A Trick to Catch the Old One: the creation of identity, the central role of clothing, the importance of access to accurate information, predation, deception, entrapment, acquistion, and situational ethics. At the same time, Middleton's mature conception of the urban world includes a more even playing field, a more realistic expectation of individual gain, and a consequent lack of gamesmanship for its own sake. As such, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside is not about the ideal, but about the real, albeit ludically configured, urban world.

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